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S E R M O N S,

BY

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NEWARK, NEW-JERSEY:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY JACOB HALSEY AND CO.
NEAR THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

1799.

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P R E F A C E.

THE following discourses I commit to the public with diffidence. There is no species of composition which it is more difficult to execute well, so as, at once, to edify and please—to give the grace of novelty to old and trite truths—and to add the decent and lawful embellishments of art to the simplicity of the gospel. Style is so much an object of cultivation, in the present age, that the most serious and interesting truths are no longer well received, unless conveyed in an agreeable manner. I have endeavored, in this respect, to consult the public taste, without sacrificing to it, however, the plainness and gravity of evan-

gelic truth. As far as I have been able, I have studied to unite the simplicity that becomes the pulpit, along with a portion of that elegance that is now so loudly demanded in every kind of writing. The subjects of discourse I have selected with as much variety as possible, and have endeavored to adapt to them a correspondent variety of style.

The French preachers, who flourished at the close of the last, and the commencement of the present century, I have, from an early period of life, admired for a certain fervor in their sacred eloquence, which the English, too frequently, want. This manner I aimed, in some degree, to transfuse into my own. And altho, in preparing these discourses for the press, and consequently for the closet, where the mind is usually in a cool and dispassionate state, I have abated somewhat of the warmth which I endeavored to support in the delivery, yet, in the greater part of

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them, this character will still be perceivable.

It is almost impossible, in the present period of society, and of the progress of letters, to treat on any subject in morals or religion that has not been illustrated, in some point of view, by some eminent writer. Altho every writer and speaker, if he has any talents, will be distinguished by a peculiar manner of thought and expression, which will give variety and novelty to a subject in *his* hands; yet, there may sometimes exist an unavoidable coincidence of sentiment between him and others, and, sometimes, another may have so happily hit off an idea that he would not wish to change it, because it cannot be changed but with disadvantage. Where a few instances of this kind occur in the following discourses, I have carefully referred to the authors, as far as my memory has served me. For this I have the example of Arch-bishop Tillotson, and other distinguished writers in the English language.

In the greater part of these discourses I have adopted the ordinary mode of division. In that on *Death*, however, I have followed the idea of the celebrated Arch-bishop of Cambray in his dialogues on eloquence, in which he recommends to a preacher to take some single truth, some simple principle of religion, as the subject of discourse; and, in the illustration, to observe a real but concealed order, not laid down in distinct propositions, nor marked by numerical characters. In a warm and pathetic strain of address this structure of a discourse may profitably be chosen; but where instruction principally is aimed at, the common practice, by distinct and marked divisions, is, perhaps, to be preferred.

Some readers would have been better pleased with profound theological discussions, and with more copious arguments and illustrations drawn from the sacred scriptures. I have chosen, however, to adapt myself to a much larger class who can hardly be in-

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duced to read writings of the kind I have just mentioned ; and I have endeavored to gain an access to their hearts for the solid and substantial truths of religion by displaying them in a manner that, if it does not gratify, will, at least, not offend their taste. Readers of every class will find in them many remarks drawn from the philosophy of human nature, mingled along with the illustrations of divine truth.

Such philosophical, critical, or historical references as I thought might wear an air of pedantry if introduced into the text I have thrown into notes. To the learned reader, indeed, they are unnecessary, -and might have been spared ; but, to those less conversant in books, they may not be unentertaining, nor entirely useless.

The design of making this publication did not originate with me. Nothing was more remote from my thoughts at the time it was suggested and urged by a valued friend from

his partiality, rather than from his judgment. And still, I am far from estimating highly its merit, or being sanguine of its success. It will at least enable me to judge whether or not any other work of the same kind is likely to be well received.—That it may be useful to any portion of my readers, and invite to serious reflection some who would not have sought it from another book is my fervent prayer, and almost my highest hope.

SAMUEL S. SMITH.

DISCOURSE I.

CAUSES OF INFIDELITY.

PSALMS LIII. 1.

The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.

IN the sacred language, the fool and the sinner signify the same person. Impiety* is opposed to the clearest principles of reason, and vice makes the sacrifice of the best and highest interests of human nature. Vicious conduct naturally leads to impiety in principle—and, reciprocally, impiety increases the strength of every sinful propensity. Irreligious principle, in every degree of it, springs out of the corruption of the heart. It is the dictate of its sinful inclinations, of its guilty wishes, of its criminal passions,

* Impiety is a term that expresses those principles that deny the being, perfections or providence of God, or those actions that most directly violate his authority, and the duty and reverence which we owe to him.

which, much more than reason, contribute to form the moral system and rule of conduct of an unbeliever. Atheism, which is its ultimate grade, will usually be found connected with extreme depravity of manners. Therefore, the sacred writer subjoins to the reflection in the text, "corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity."

The progress of infidelity, like that of vice, is gradual. Men at first entertain doubts concerning those laws, only, of religion which are most directly opposed to their favorite pleasures. By degrees they question every doctrine that imposes any restraint upon their most indifferent vices. At last, they are emboldened to reject the whole system of revelation. When the authority of revealed religion is thrown off, no limits can be assigned to incredulity and error. Having no standard of truth, each man's moral system will be framed agreeably to his inclinations. And these inclinations, according to the common maxims of a vicious philosophy,* will be erected into laws of nature. God, as the moral govern-

* See introduction to Rousseau's Confessions.

or of the universe, will be excluded from his plan as soon as that doctrine becomes inconvenient; and *fate, necessity, accident*, I know not what, will be substituted in his room. Atheism is only the last link in that chain of impious conclusions that arise out of the depravity of the heart. And, indeed, between the rejection of revelation, and absolute impiety, there is, in the philosophy of the present age, hardly any middle grade. The one and the other rest upon the same principles, and are equally liable to the severe censure of the sacred writer—The fool hath formed the conclusion *in his heart*. It is the heart that reasons, and folly decides. In treating of the causes of infidelity, which I purpose to do in the present, and in a future discourse I shall take the subject in this extent, as questioning generally the truth of religion. It is not my intention to enter into any discussion of the evidences of religion either natural or revealed.—These have often been displayed with such clearness, and established with such force of argument by a multitude of excellent writers, that it cannot be proof, but honesty and candor which men require to make them sincere and humble converts to the cross of

Christ. Frequently, the best refutation of infidelity is to expose it to itself, and to lay open its real principles and motives. This I purpose to do in the following discourses:

In the introduction, permit me to observe that this subject, never unimportant, is, at the present period particularly interesting, and worthy your most serious attention. Europe is deluged with a flood of impiety. The corruption of her manners is daily increasing the extent of the evil. Her philosophers and wits, her orators and poets, are continually opening wider its sluices, and adding to it that force and extension which genius alone can give to the principles of vice. Our own country, although as yet but in the infancy of its existence, is rapidly imitating the degeneracy of her manners, and, consequently, the licence of her principles. You see the professed disciples of an impious philosophy filling many of the most respectable stations in society—You frequently see, in the upper classes of fortune, an open and undisguised neglect, and even contempt of the institutions of piety—You see a profligate generation rising up, who affect to sport with every moral tie,

and to treat with levity the most sacred doctrines of religion, and that great depository of truth, the holy scriptures. Let us examine the principles upon which they act: to develop them will be to demonstrate their folly. They may be comprised under the heads of Vice, of Ignorance, and, of Vanity.*

I. Infidelity, in the first place, is commonly founded in vice. Rare is it, indeed, that men commence their course of impiety by rational and serious doubts concerning the authenticity of the sacred scriptures—that, actuated by an honest love of truth, they have profoundly and impartially examined the evidence on which they rest—and when, on good grounds, they have been convinced that there existed no divine law to controul their conduct, and no supreme judge to whom they were amenable, have then only indulged in greater licence of manners. On the other hand, do we not almost always see them begin by relaxation of morals; and, after their tastes and habits have been vitiated, then, and only then,

* *Massillon Doutes sur la Religion.*

think of questioning truths that controul their propensities, or condemn their pleasures.* As long as they preserved their original simplicity of manners, they received with respect, the religion of their fathers, and entertained, without suspicion, the sacred principles instilled into them in their education, and so strongly recommended by the voice of uncorrupted reason. When their manners began to change, they found new questions continually rising in their minds, concerning doctrines which hitherto had appeared so respectable and holy.— Their doubts kept pace with their vices. As every successive indulgence threw down the fences of virtue to a greater extent, they found themselves tempted, by degrees, to bring in question, every law of religion that opposed their inclinations, and at length, by one bold and decisive effort, to reject the whole.

This is not an unfounded representation, resting merely on a pious prejudice. It is a matter of experience—and for the truth

* From this remark, may be excepted a few, who seem to be governed from the beginning of life, by a peculiar perversity of natural temper.

of it, I confidently appeal to the experience of those who affect to disbelieve the gospel, and to treat it with an unholy levity, if their infidelity did not commence in a pursuit of pleasure, too free to be reconciled to its pure, humble, and self-denied spirit. At first, conscience, not yet perverted by false principles, nor rendered callous by the habit of sinning, would remonstrate against their criminal pursuits. These remonstrances would be accompanied with resolutions of amendment; but, finding every resolution overcome as soon as the temptation was renewed, despairing, at length, of their own fortitude to conquer, they studied only to justify their inclinations.

A man has powerful reasons for endeavouring to reconcile his opinions with his conduct—if his practice is not supported by principle, it lays the foundation of a painful and distressing conflict in the mind—he is miserable who, always a slave to his passions, is, at the same time, always overwhelmed by his own self-reproaches—when his passions are too strong for his sentiments and purposes of duty; when he finds it difficult to change his habits, and is unwilling

to renounce his pleasures, he soon endeavours to modify his principles according to them. And, unhappily, when a man studies to deceive himself, it is always in his own power—it is his heart, not his understanding—his wishes, not his reason, that then decide upon truth.

Another proof that irreligious principles are the fruits of vicious and loose living, is the spirit of the objections, that are usually made against religion.

Are they not pointed against those doctrines, chiefly that are most directly opposed to the criminal inclinations and pursuits of men? The continence and purity required by the gospel, first awaken the enmity of the libertine and profligate, and raise in them a wish to find it false. Its sobriety and temperance displease the dissolute: its meekness, forbearance and humility, offend the proud and resentful. The spirit of retreat, of devotion, and heavenly mindedness which it enjoins revolts those whose hopes and enjoyments centre only in this world. In a word, the predominant and characteristic vice of each sinner first impels him to

seek for objections against religion. Above all, are not these objections urged with the greatest zeal against those doctrines so dreadful to the guilty, the final judgment of God, and the eternal retributions of his justice? Is it not in order to free their minds of the apprehensions created by these awful truths, that they so earnestly endeavour to shake the deepest foundations of the christian faith? These ideas give no molestation to virtue: they are terrible only to vice, and vice alone is solicitous to destroy them. Because "the carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to his law, neither indeed can be," it would endeavour to annihilate both the law and the lawgiver.

While, enslaved as they are to their lusts, they admit the authority of religion, they are compelled secretly to tremble at the ideas of futurity. Their fears are a proof of their crimes. In this case, their only resource for peace of mind is to renounce religion; to persuade themselves, that, at death, they shall cease to exist; and that, hereafter, there will be neither tribunal nor judge. When these ideas are establish-

ed, conscience has no more ground for its reproofs; the heart no more cause for its fears. To this point, therefore, all their studies are bent, that they may acquire tranquility in the pleasureable pursuits of vice. Sensual pleasure is their supreme good, and if they can divest themselves of all apprehensions for the future, into it they plunge, with headlong and brutal appetite.

It is the object of all those writers, who have lately distinguished themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ, to establish the licentious idea, that death is an eternal sleep; that there is no moral governor of the universe, no judge to whom we are accountable for our actions. And is it not the object of philosophy in every nation, and in every age, when morals have become extremely corrupted, to prove that men have the same end with the brutes, only that they may abandon themselves to the same appetites?

If religion presented nothing to their faith but abstruse speculations, and incomprehensible mysteries that had no relation to morals, they would pass them with the

same indifference, that they do the abstractions of any other science: but it touches the heart, and controuls their lusts—therefore it is, that it awakens in them the keenest opposition. They profess, indeed, to be shocked at its mysteries; they find doctrines in it that revolt their reason, and on these they incessantly declaim: but, it is only to conceal from themselves and from the world, the true grounds of their enmity. It is because religion commands them to renounce this guilty commerce; to sacrifice this criminal connection; to subdue this dominant lust, and to flee even the motives and temptations to evil, that it excites all rancour of hatred, and all the bitterness of hostility. Ashamed to avow these dishonorable causes, they endeavour to enlist reason in the service of the passions, and pretend to rest on it an infidelity, that takes its true origin from the heart. It is because religion can make no compromise with vice, that it is the object of their abhorrence.—By the rancour of their minds, we may judge of the real ground of their enmity to the law of Christ. Hypocrisy and imposture, are the least crimes which they impute to religion. Their sarcasms and sneers, they are

never tired of reiterating against its histories, its doctrines, and its ministers. They urge them on all occasions; they repeat them without regard to decency or opportunity. The malignity of their hearts, the irritation of provoked and disappointed passions, continually burst forth, and display themselves in the whole manner of their opposition to the institutions of piety. Too plain it is, to be denied, that their pretended infidelity, and their declared hostility to religion, take their rise solely from their vices.

Another proof that infidelity springs from the vices of men is, that, usually, it keeps pace with their passions; it flourishes in prosperity—in adversity it loses its confidence and effrontery. The tide of pleasure buoys it up; health, and a vigorous flow of spirits, keep far out of view that interesting period that tries the honesty and solidity of the principles of our conduct. But, let affliction weaken the force of the passions—let some great and unexpected reverse of providence wrest from the proud the power or the wealth in which they trusted, and from the voluptuous the pleasures which intoxicated

them—let them be reduced to feel the vanity and uncertainty of the world, within the narrow circle of which they had circumscribed all their happiness and their hopes—their infidelity begins to totter—their hearts begin to misgive them—that future world which they had hitherto despised, and professed to disbelieve, begins to acquire reality and importance—anxiety and alarm take possession of the soul, and in the moment of distress and weakness, when they most need a support like that of religion, they are left to despair. When real danger appears, their pretended principles are not able to sustain them: they find indeed that they had no principles—they were only the deceitful dictates of a sensual heart, which they had mistaken for principles. Why do their opinions vibrate? Infidels in prosperity, believers in extreme adversity—Why does their boasted impiety forsake them at a season so critical? If it were founded on reason, it could not change—reason is always the same. But, resting only on the passions and the vices, it is mutable like them. When the fuel that nourishes them is withdrawn, its delusions and effrontery are both at an end.

Let a sinner who glories in his fancied strength of mind, because he is not governed by vulgar prejudices and superstitious fears, approach that sincere hour when things begin to appear in their true lights, when the world which had deceived him is vanishing from his sight, when he feels himself drawing near that eternal existence which now assumes an awful reality, and the terrors of divine justice impose a dreadful necessity to be honest—ah! at this moment, can he rest upon his principles? Vain principles! they are swept away like light and withered leaves before the rising storm. Instead of that tranquil and affected incredulity with which he formerly dismissed the duties of piety, or sneered at its remonstrances, you see him agitated by cruel and excessive fears. His heart trembles and faints within him, at the prospect of a judgment to come. Does he any longer cavil at the evidences, or revolt at the incredible doctrines of religion? Does he demand new proofs of it before he will believe? No; he *believes and trembles*. It is not its evidences, but its comforts, which he requires. You hear him intreat for those holy offices which once he despised. He calls for those ministers

of God who formerly were the objects of his neglect, perhaps of his foolish scorn. It is not now the question with him, if there be a God? If there be a future state of retribution? These truths rush with fearful evidence upon his soul; but, with the trembling jailor, "what shall I do to be saved?" He presses the verge of an eternal existence—the past presents nothing but subjects of gloomy and self-condemning reflection—the future offers nothing but a fearful and overwhelming despair. If a ray of hope strikes upon his mind, through the awful darkness that surrounds him, it is derived only from that despised religion, to which, too late perhaps, he now flees for refuge. Oh! 'tis an honest hour that tries to the bottom, the foundations of infidelity. How few can then stand the severe scrutiny of conscience, or bear the test of their own reason when disentangled from those objects that used to deceive it? Not one, perhaps, of all that witling tribe, who insult or cavil at a religion, which they have never examined. When the props on which his impiety had rested, are torn from beneath the sinner, by the unrelenting hand of death, the wretched fabric

tumbles on his guilty head, and crushes him beneath the ruins.

Is this representation drawn too high? Penitent Rochester! I appeal to the tears and confessions of thy last moments.* Was not this the language of thy despair, ferocious Blount! whom thy miseries compelled to be thy own executioner?† And Shaftesbury! gay and mirthful Shaftesbury! so apprehensive wert thou of the impotence of thy philosophy, to support thee in this great conflict, that thou hast forewarned thy friends not to receive as genuine, any sentiments on religion, which thou mightest utter, in the weakness of nature, during her last struggles. Thou hast, by anticipation, abjured a confession thou wast afraid the honesty of death might extort from thee?‡

* The noted Earl of Rochester, the history of whose libertinism and penitence, has been written by Bishop Burnet.

† The author of the *Oracles of Reason*, who, at last, becoming gloomy and melancholy, in a fit of despair, put an end to his own life.

‡ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, equally celebrated for his wit and his infidelity. He was so successful in the use of delicate irony, that he endeavoured to establish it as a principle, that ridicule is the proper test of truth. From the example of many other infidels, he was

Such examples demonstrate that many, even of those who arrogate to themselves the distinction of being philosophic infidels, have not acted in life under the full conviction of their own principles. A secret doubt still lurked at the bottom of their hearts, which the light of eternity, as they approached towards it, has disclosed to view. And, does not almost every libertine, in the intervals of his passions, after the intoxication of pleasure is off the mind, find his conscience misgive him when, in a cool and serious hour, he looks forward to the end of life?

This is a new proof that the principles of infidelity, which he sports in the moments of levity, and on which he sometimes affects to reason, are not embraced with candor and sincerity—they are the offspring of the passions, and that only during the season of prosperity—affliction, which strips the enchantment from vice, shakes the confidence

apprehensive, lest the fears of death might shake the firmness of his philosophy, and draw from him some declaration favorable to religion. He requests his friends, if he should make any such declaration, to ascribe it to the weakness of nature, and to take his real sentiments from his writings.

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which the mind had reposed in them. The serious prospect of eternity overwhelms them with despair.

Such is the opprobrious origin of infidelity. It continually speaks to us, indeed, of the superior illumination of reason; but it springs out of the very bosom of darkness. It boasts of a strength of mind superior to other men; but it shews us only the weakness of a corrupted heart, a slave to the most disgraceful lusts. Ah! this vaunted strength is nothing but the boldness and intoxication of vice, that will shortly be converted into abject fear, and that now often trembles in secret at its own daring. Frequently, indeed, the most confident appearances of impiety are united with real and disquieting apprehensions of the truth of religion. The profligate endeavors to escape from his own reflections, by plunging into successive scenes of dissipation. An ostentatious display of impiety, an excessive levity on the subject of religion, is intended merely to cover from the world, or to stifle in his own breast, the apprehensions that disturb his peace. He derives a kind of persuasion in favor of falshood by frequently repeating it. If the

principles of his education sometimes recur with force ; if the fears of futurity, at certain moments, disquiet him ; he studies to repress them, and to fortify his heart against itself, by venting, in a bold and indecent stile, the maxims of impiety. His scoffs, his sneers, his profane declamations against religion, are they any proof of the real and settled conviction of his mind ? Far from it. His mind is weak and timid ; and he strives only to support his courage by playing the infidel. He is a coward who endeavours to allay, or conceal his apprehensions by an overacted bravery—He resembles a foolish child who sings in the dark to chase away his own fears.*

Every view which we have taken of the subject, tends to confirm the truth which I proposed to illustrate, that one, and, perhaps, the principal cause of that infidelity, real or pretended, that infects the circles of fashionable dissipation, and has plunged so many profligate youth in the depths of impiety, is to be found in the growing vice and licentiousness of the public manners. “The fool hath said in his heart there is no God—

* Maffillon.

Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity."

A few philosophic infidels, perhaps, in whom a taste for study and science may have corrected the grosser disorders of the passions, will feel themselves little affected by the general strain of the observations hitherto made. Yet is it true, notwithstanding, that the ground of their opposition to the gospel, is an inward and strong aversion to the purity and holiness of its precepts. They cannot submit their hearts to the yoke of the Redeemer; therefore, they endeavour to break and cast it off. But I have chiefly in view that numerous tribe who have never even superficially examined the principles of christianity—who have adopted the cant rather than the philosophy of impiety—and who continually sport its principles as a justification of their irregularities. Unhappy men! who are tearing away, with pernicious zeal, every remaining tie that yet imposes any check upon your career to ruin; for one moment seriously consider your state—pause in your course, and look forward to its end. If there is a God, with what aggravated terror will you at last meet

this judge whom you had not expected? If the gospel is true, what, O miserable souls! must be your fearful destiny? Can your impious levity change the eternal nature of right and wrong, or, by making you forget, suspend the punishment of your crimes? Can your denial, or your oblivion of your creator, impede the sure and awful course of his justice?

If infidelity is condemned by the disgraceful principle from which it springs, it is not less condemned by its unhappy consequences. That horrible doctrine that removes God from the universe, presents nothing to the rational view but a boundless waste of death—of inevitable sufferings during a few moments of existence, followed by the hideous prospect of eternal annihilation. If the system of nature is not arranged and governed by a wise and gracious providence; if we do not exist by the power, and under the protection of a merciful and almighty parent; if there is no happiness but by accident, and the transient possession of it must only augment the pain of being speedily torn from it forever; if misery is urged upon us by the laws of a fatal necessity, and

there is no remedy for extreme suffering; if in this life only we have hope, and all beyond is a fearful gulph of everlasting oblivion; then existence is a curse, this world is a dreary prison, the good man may sit down in despair, and weep over his own being; or, like the sons of guilty pleasure, he may renounce his useless virtue, and say, "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!"

The certain tendency of principles of irreligion is to increase the immorality and license from which they spring. Whatever weakens the obligations of piety, tends to dissolve both the ties of virtue, and the restraints of vice. Convenience and power become the only rule of justice—inclination and opportunity the only limit of voluptuousness. Relaxation of morals marches in the front, libertinism follows in the train of infidelity.—How cautious ought youth to be even of listening to principles so flattering to the passions, but so dangerous to the soul! Shun, as the most ruinous enemies, those false friends who endeavour to insinuate into you the fatal poison. Suspect the gay and fascinating forms of plea-

sure under which they present vice to your choice—for, in the end, “it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.”

These principles appear in their most pernicious and detestable form when they invade, as, in some instances, even in this young country they have done, that sex whose peculiar glory is modesty and chastity. Religion should always find an asylum in the female breast. It is the highest embellishment, and it is the greatest security of their characteristic virtues. When their religious sentiments begin to be corrupted, society is on the verge of dissolution—licentiousness then is under no restraint. But, while their hearts preserve the sacred deposit of religion, entrusted to them in their early education, they impose the most effectual check upon libertinism of manners.—To their piety, the public morals will owe the most essential obligations. Detest, therefore, and shun the man who would ever attempt to seduce your heart, by betraying your understanding. The principles of irreligion can never be insinuated to you but with the basest designs. Pleasure is the decoy of vice, and the advocate of im-

piety. Whenever she offers her enticements, suspect some latent danger. She is a Syren whose song lures unwary voyagers into the midst of gulphs that swallow them up, and amongst rocks that dash them to pieces. Shut your ears against her enchantments—close your hearts against her destructive charms. Religion is your safeguard and your ornament—it is the surest basis both of your honor and your happiness.

Permit me, in the conclusion, to address a serious admonition to those young persons who, wishing for greater license, are beginning to pronounce, though with a feeble and hesitating tone, the language of infidelity. You are, as yet, little aware of the fatal issue to which you are tending. When once you begin to display your doubts, or your wit on the subject of religion, or to seek for arguments to relax its ties, the progress is commonly rapid towards the point of absolute impiety. Every criminal indulgence becomes a new argument with the heart, against the law of Christ which condemns it. By embracing the principles of infidelity, you are seeking for a peace of conscience in the pursuits of vice which

they can never yield. The great and fundamental truths of religion are too deeply implanted in human nature to be easily eradicated. And, while they remain, they must disquiet the tranquility of the sinner. You may deny the existence of a righteous Deity—in your heart you may wish there were none—you may secretly say to yourself, in the moment of temptation, *there is no God*; but, still the sentiment of his fear remains—the bodings of his justice follow your crimes—ah! these bodings are the deep, infallible dictates of nature: they are sure presages, to the impenitent, of an awful retribution. Arrest, then, your step, if you are yet only entering on the threshold of impiety. Seek, while you may, the precious refuge of religion, that will, ere long, be denied to the hardened sinner. In the hour of affliction you will find in its despised institutions, in its doctrines, and its hopes, your only consolation. But if you deny your Creator—if you persist to reject *the Lord who bought you*, to whom, or to what, will you have recourse in your extremity?—When the cold hand of death is pressing upon you—when you are trembling before the king of terrors, oh! with what dreadful

importunity will you be constrained to implore the mercy of that God whom you have denied! will you call for the aids of that religion which you have insulted! Good God! the terror of looking into the grave under a fearful uncertainty about our eternal being; or, under the more fearful apprehensions of eternal misery! Unthinking youth! who are sporting with subjects of such infinite moment, or asking with a sneer, for the reasons on which religion commands your faith, and your obedience—look on the death-bed of an unbeliever, and see the reasons! There is an object in which you may contemplate the value of religion, and the falsehood of those impious principles on which you are hazarding your salvation. See the trembling, the expiring, the despairing mortal! His terrors speak to you with the evidence of demonstration, and declare the existence of a holy and righteous judge of the universe. His language, and his looks proclaim the reality of the dreadful retribution he is going to receive. The remorse which distracts him, should preach the gospel to you with the most persuasive eloquence. Ah! impiety of living is a dreadful preparative for a

dying bed. Fatal indeed is his folly who *says in his heart there is no God*, till that moment of irremediable terror and dismay when he sees him already dressed and seated for judgment. "Behold, now is the accepted time—behold, now is the day of salvation!" "Turn ye, therefore, to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope!"

DISCOURSE II.

CAUSES OF INFIDELITY.

 PSALMS LIII. 1.

The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.

THE reflection of the sacred writer in this passage relates immediately to that desperate atheism which denies the existence of an infinite and eternal Spirit, the maker and the judge of men; or, to that oblivion of God which seizes sinners in the ordinary train of life, and leaves their passions and their vices without restraint. I have extended the idea so as to embrace the principles of infidelity universally, inasmuch as they are all effects proceeding from the same cause. The character of the fool may well be applied, not only to those cool and speculative unbelievers who have established to themselves systems of impiety from the abuse and perversion of reason, but to those

light and ignorant pretenders to infidelity who have only adopted from others certain licentious maxims which they have not been able to connect with their principles or their consequences; or, whose powers reach no farther than to indulge a perpetual vein of rude wit, and indecent pleasantry on the subject of religion. In a discourse of this nature, adapted to general instruction, persons of this character will perhaps merit our principal attention—because sober and rational infidels are rarely to be met with, while impudent and ignorant men are every where to be found.

In treating of the principles of infidelity, and exposing their criminality and folly, I have avoided entering into any consideration of the excellence of the gospel, or of the evidence on which it rests. I have confined my attention to unfold those guilty and disgraceful causes that usually combine their influence to render men enemies to religion. These I have endeavoured to comprehend under the heads of vice, of ignorance, and of vanity—Vice that creates in the heart an inveterate enmity to the law of God, and puts an unjust bias on the mind

in judging of divine truth—Ignorance that has never seriously and impartially examined the subject—And Vanity that assumes a false and frivolous honor to itself for thinking differently from the bulk of mankind.

The first of these causes I have already illustrated. I proceed to observe, that

II. Ignorance is a frequent source of those irreligious principles, and discourses that every where produce so much evil in society. An ignorance as criminal, as it is disgraceful—that springs as much from the corruption of the heart which is unwilling to see the truth, as from the defect of the understanding which has never sincerely examined it.

I have not in view at present a few philosophic infidels whose memory the annals of literature have preserved, and who, by wisdom, knew not God—who have left the fame of their genius, with their pernicious writings to infect posterity—but, who have left also their errors, and contradictions to be added to the innumerable proofs which

every age has furnished of the weakness and uncertainty of human reason on all subjects of divine and moral science, when not illuminated by the spirit of God. These ingenious enemies of the gospel, however, have been men of wit rather than of profound talents. Their prejudices have led them to examine the question of its truth on one side only. They have been willing to see nothing but presumptions against religion. Distinguished more by the powers of the imagination than by those of the understanding, you find them, where they ought to be most serious and grave, indulging a perpetual vein of ridicule and wit. The most philosophic of modern infidels has confessed that his metaphysical subtleties are not calculated to produce a clear and settled conviction of their truth in the mind.* The inaccuracy of Voltaire in history and antiquities, so necessary to just ex-

* Mr. Hume, after endeavouring, with great ingenuity, to annihilate both the material and the spiritual world, as they are usually understood, and to establish the principle that nothing exists in the universe but various and successive trains of ideas, acknowledges that, although he could find no reasons sufficiently solid to overthrow what he had advanced, yet, he could not act upon his own conclusions, nor, at all times, yield them a clear and unwavering assent.

amination of the authenticity of religion, is almost proverbial. These subjects he considered as hardly worthy the attention of an author whose fame depended solely on his wit.†—But, separated from his faults, what is he, or the most famous patrons of an infidel philosophy, compared with the Newtons, the Boyles, the Clarkes, the Warburtons, the Lockes, the Fenelons, the Rollins, the Pascals, and all that endless list of great names, distinguished equally for genius and for piety, who have appeared as the friends of religion, and have brought the most profound and illustrious talents as a voluntary offering to the foot of the cross.

But these discourses have chiefly in view a class of men very different from the spe-

† Thomas Paine, in that book of his entitled *The Age of Reason*, infinitely exceeds Mr. Voltaire in historical and critical inaccuracy. He has a certain sprightliness of manner and boldness of assertion which distinguish him; but so totally defective is he in point of erudition, that in no other country but this, where there is much superficial reading, but little solid and extensive learning, could his work have obtained any currency. Those parts of it which have any appearance of reasoning he has borrowed almost wholly from Mr. Boulanger. For the rest, it is made up of the half-remembered ideas of his childhood, of indigested criticisms picked up in a loose reading, and of the most palpable violations of historical truth.

culative and ingenious unbelievers who have just been named—a class to be met with in most fashionable circles, and, every where, among the smatterers in knowledge, who are merely the apes of the former. I mean those men of pleasure, who are enemies to religion, because religion is an enemy to their vices—who never have examined the luminous and respectable evidence on which the gospel rests—who speak with confidence of what they do not know, and blaspheme what they do not understand—the delight of the frivolous and vain, the oracles of the ignorant—who retail among their companions objections against religion with which they have been furnished by a loose and desultory reading, or which have passed from mouth to mouth among the libertine and profligate till they have become vulgar and stale. A great preacher* has happily called them the *echoes* of infidelity, who just repeat the blasphemies which they have heard from others—The mere organs of impiety who serve to convey its traditions from one race to another.

* Massillon.

To attack doctrines that have stood the test of so many ages—that have been illustrated by the greatest writers with the most luminous evidence, and established on the most solid foundations—that have counted among their submissive disciples men of the most illustrious characters, and the most profound learning who have esteemed their obedience to the faith their chief glory—doctrines that have commanded the homage of the wisest as well as the most powerful of mankind, would require uncommon genius and erudition, deep reflection, and extensive research. Is this the character of those forward and conceited youth who preach infidelity in the circles of their libertine companions—who declaim with pertness on the credulity of the vulgar, and the craft of the priesthood—who are ever ready to jest on the subject of religion, and aim, by an impious effrontery, at a reputation for wit which nothing but the ignorance of their hearers can ascribe to them? No, they are men of superficial talents, too much devoted to their pleasures to think. It would be doing them too much honor to stile them Theists, or Atheists, or, indeed, to call them by any name that implies a

system of principles. Their limited knowledge is sufficient only to embarrass their minds with difficulties on the subject of religion, not to furnish their solution—to create doubts not to afford certainty.

Their doubts are accompanied with a dishonesty of mind that does not wish to have them resolved. They form a convenient protection for their vices, which every approach to the truth serves to disquiet and fill with apprehensions. *They hate the light; neither come they to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov'd.* Far from seeking for real and solid information, which, if they were sincere, they could not fail to obtain on a subject enlightened by the labours of so many pious and excellent writers, their only study is to shun conviction.

One knows not, at some times, whether most to pity, or be amused at men of this description when they affect to represent religion as a pious prejudice, and to reproach the credulity of the believing multitude. Is there no credulity, are there no prejudices attached to impiety? Alas! can any prejudices be so strong as those

formed by the passions against the truth? as those with which vice combats religion? Can any credulity be more absurd and weak than that which is often displayed by the enemies of religion when their aim is to depreciate the character of a good man, or when they think they have found a tale that will militate against the sacred history? Nor is this confined alone to those pert, illiterate *fools* who excite your contempt, while they provoke your honest indignation—this disgraceful blot stains the reputation of writers of the greatest name who have enlisted themselves among the champions of impiety.* The fables of nurses and of children are not more ridiculous than the narrations that have been gravely made, and the fictions that have been assumed by philosophers to contradict the Mosaic system of the world, and of the origin of man.†

* Isaac Vossius, the famous grammarian, was so remarkable for his credulity and his infidelity, that king Charles once wittily said of him, "There is nothing you cannot make that man believe except his Bible."

† In lord Kaimes' *Sketches of Man*, and lord Monboddo on *The origin of Languages*, may be seen some very extraordinary relations of ignorant travellers, and some most absurd fictions adopted in order to discredit the Mosaic account of the primitive state of human nature, and the unity of the human race. Because Moses has informed us that the world, at

And the most celebrated wit of modern times,* if he can, by ranging through antiquity, find one fable more improbable than another, its certain recommendation, and title to belief, is its inconsistency with the history of the bible.

first, was a chaotic mass covered with water, Monsieur Bailly, that he may recede from him as far as possible, has supposed, in his letters to Voltaire, that it was originally a ball of fire struck off from the sun by the impulse of a comet, and that it has, in an almost infinite succession of ages, been gradually cooling, and becoming a fit habitation for man, and that the first habitable spots were at the poles. If this had been a tenet of religion, how would such a philosopher as Monsieur Bailly have received it?

* Mr. Voltaire, you find in him every where the most incongruous relations, and the most palpable contradictions on the subject of religion. See *letters addressed to him by certain Jews* for many examples of this kind. To the list of credulous or fanciful writers Mr. Volney may very fairly be added, if indeed he believed his own fictions, and did not rather value himself on making the most extravagant suppositions, only that he might make a great display of learning in supporting them. This author, estimable as an historian, immediately becomes visionary as an anti-religionist. This charge will be fully established in the mind of every candid and judicious reader who shall examine his attempt to prove the christian religion to be nothing more than a corrupted worship of the sun—and that the history of the innocence and fall of man, of the woman, the temptation, the serpent, and the curse, is only an astronomical hieroglyphic of the Egyptian priests to signify spring, summer, autumn, and winter, and the constellations that preside over these seasons. See his *Ruins of Palmyra*—If christianity were obliged to have recourse to such incredible suppositions to support the history of the scriptures, what a triumph would it afford to unbelievers!

Christians are reproached for receiving their religion by inheritance, and embracing their faith on the ground only of authority. How justly may the charge of shameful dependence on authority be retorted on the crowd of unbelievers who never examine for themselves the foundations of religion, but, wishing only to find it false, and not able to rely on their own judgment, agree to pay homage to the wit and understanding of a few enemies to the cross of Christ whose talents they admire, and make them alone the oracles of their faith. Perhaps, without talents, they have nothing to recommend them but a sprightly libertinism, and a confident manner. Perhaps they do not really believe the principles which vauntingly they profess—Possibly, their own hearts misgive them while they utter their blasphemies; but, covered with an imposing air, they deceive and seduce the ignorant who look for example only to justify their unbelief, and, like the timid and the feeble, draw all their courage from the confidence of others. Such are the apostles and prophets of impiety! and such their weak and implicit disciples!

Admitting that the great body of believers derive their faith from education, who, I pray you, merits the reproach of the most dishonorable credulity? He who suffers his religious principles to be influenced by the opinions of his country—by the instructions of parents solicitous for his virtue and happiness—by the venerable authority of ages—by the example of the best and wisest men in every age—by the gravity and sacredness of the church the faithful depository and guardian of piety and morals? Or he who adopts his opinions from libertines and debauchees—from the idle, the dissolute, and the vain—from men, perhaps equally ignorant, but, only, possessing more effrontery than himself?—Alas! how often does the corruption of principle, as well as of manners, which is the disgrace of so many youth of the present age, spring merely from the force of vicious example on the weak and ignorant—from immoral maxims, from ridiculous anecdotes, from loose sentiments sported without thought, in a moment of levity, by men distinguished for no talent, except an imposing vivacity, and of no science except what they have picked up in the school of libertinism? Ah! if false science

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has destroyed her thousands, ignorance has destroyed her tens of thousands—An ignorance that is increasing more and more in proportion as luxury and dissipation degenerate our manners, and check the progress of solid and useful improvement.

This character, so disgraceful as well as criminal, ought to repress that idle and contemptible

III. Vanity which I have stated, in the last place, as another cause of that ambitious infidelity that no longer retires from sight, but boldly obtrudes its deformity and crimes on the public view.

Vanity! Can man be vain of degrading his nature, and sinking it to the level of the brutes that perish—of quenching that celestial spark which the Creator hath enkindled in his bosom—of effacing from the mind the glorious and consolatory idea of God—of destroying the eternal source of order and beauty in the universe—of extinguishing the sublime and blessed hope of immortality—of digging for himself the fearful grave of everlasting oblivion? Yes;

we see the monstrous spirit of infidelity assume a deplorable honor to itself from causes that should expel it with horror from society, and forever cover it with disgrace in the opinion of the virtuous and wise.

1. Vanity prompts some conceited and injudicious youth to make a display of impious principles, because they are supposed to carry with them a genteel air. Pleasure being almost the universal pursuit, the principles that afford it a protection, and screen it from the reproaches of reason, and the censure of conscience, meet, in all circles, too favorable an attention. That man is assured of being well received, who can insinuate ideas of loose pleasure with ingenuity, and make their apology with sprightliness. And, so depraved have manners become, that he who aims to be a fashionable man, too often finds it contribute to his success, in the circles of wealth and idleness, to mingle his conversation with a seasoning of impiety. When fashion has so far misplaced its approbation, a crowd of weak young men, ambitious to display their parts, go even beyond what fashion requires. In order to provoke the laughter, and attract

the admiration of the thoughtless and the dissolute they dare indecently to trifle with whatever is most venerable and holy, and to violate the most sacred mysteries with a profane tongue. Deceived by the pleasantries which they excite where they ought to meet with nothing but indignation or contempt, they misconstrue petulance into wit, and hold themselves to be men of talents when they are only impudent men.

2. Their vanity is apt to assume a merit to itself for thinking differently from the rest of mankind. In an age in which manners are not yet totally depraved, the mass of the people respect religion. The sentiments of piety are written by the hand of nature at the bottom of the human heart, and nothing but extreme vice, or the pride, and the false refinements of speculation can efface them. Institutions which the world venerates, these men claim a miserable glory from despising. What is common has, with them, an air of vulgarity; and, in the esteem of *fools*, they shew a superiority of understanding while they insult the opinions of their country, and the world. Weak minds are apt to imagine that they recommend

their spirit, and their courage by spurning at the fears which influence other men. The awful considerations of a future judgment and future retribution, they affect to represent as imaginary terrors. And, frequently, a good man must see with pity the self-complacent vanity with which ignorant and petulant young men regard their own wisdom and fortitude for having delivered themselves from all the impressions of a pious education, and torn off the shackles of religious fear. Alas! what a reverse of abject fear, and of horrible despair shall overwhelm them, when the supreme judge shall come to awaken them from this vain dream—when he shall unsettle all their false and criminal principles by the stroke of affliction—when he shall dismay them by the terrors of his justice—when the abyss of eternity, opening upon their view, discloses those dreadful realities which, in the days of their folly, they had despised; and shews beneath them no support from the promises of divine grace, or the hopes of a better life!

3. Another claim to be vain they found on the fancied resemblance which they bear

to certain men of distinguished genius who have unhappily prostituted their talents to the service of impiety and vice. By quoting names which science hath consecrated, they hope to attach themselves to their glory, and to derive an honor from thinking like them. That there have been unbelievers of penetrating minds, and polished wit, I am not disposed to deny—nor can it be denied on the other hand, that men destitute both of wit and penetration are continually affecting a vain reputation from being able only to retail their maxims. Hume! Rousseau! how many vain conceited youth have you contributed to destroy! Your writings* still continue to diffuse a baneful poison through society! Oh! fatal talents! that have produced so many ambitious imitators aspiring to resemble you, but who can resemble you in nothing but your crimes!

Such are the motives that commonly incline men to the side of infidelity. In pro-

* Those writings that were immediately directed against the interests of piety, and the foundations of revealed religion. For the rest, they are always ingenious, and Hume, in particular, generally useful.

portion as a man is virtuous, chaste, temperate, modest, profoundly affected with the displays of divine intelligence and goodness in the structure of the universe, and penetrated with the dutiful sentiments that become a creature, to the Creator, and that are so honorable to human nature, will he be disposed to embrace the principles, and to become the friend of religion—But, if he is ignorant, vain, lewd, intemperate, profligate—here is a prepared soil ready to receive the seeds of impiety. Ah! are these the grounds on which unbelievers boast the strength of their minds? Are they grounds that will support the solid fabric of truth?

These discourses I shall now conclude with a few reflections addressed to young persons, and especially, to the studious youth in this assembly.

In this precious and critical period of life your habits, and your principles are both to be formed. These have such a reciprocal connexion and influence, that, if you suffer yourselves to be seduced by pleasure, you are in hazard of plunging into impiety. Urged by the ardor of passions that are just

beginning to unfold themselves—flattered by hope which, as yet, has seldom disappointed you—exposed to the example, and the sollicitations of the thoughtless and the dissipated—and without experience to caution or direct you, you are encompassed with dangers, not the least of which is that of adopting false maxims of conduct, and false principles on the subject of religion. You are in danger from companions, and you are in danger from books.—The propensities of your age expose you to companions who, in the pursuit of pleasure, have cast of the fear, and almost the remembrance of God. You will see realized among them all those causes to which I have ascribed the prevalence of impious principles. But, while you see them, you are in hazard of being infected by them. Powerful is the contagion of vicious sympathy; and the ardent inclinations to pleasure, the limited knowledge, the unripened prudence of youth, often expose them as an easy prey to *seducers who lie in wait to deceive*. Avoid those dangerous companions who *make a mock of sin*; and, above all, those who not only *say in their heart there is no God*, but, who are vain of their folly, and proclaim

their impiety with a brazen front. These administer to young minds the most fatal poison—more dangerous than contagion and the pestilence, they draw after them a mighty train of ruin. Beginning only with apologies for your propensities, they stop not till they have whelmed you in the dreadful gulph of impiety.

You are in danger from books. Those writers are first apt to catch the youthful attention, that please by a certain brilliancy and wit, that agitate the heart, and taint the imagination. Those especially seem to be sought after, at the present period, with peculiar zeal, that attempt to shake the foundations of religion, and, by removing the idea of God, and of his holy inspection and government from the universe, relax the ties of moral obligation, and give an unrestrained licence to the passions. In your choice of books let solidity and truth be their principal recommendation. These will always be found favourable to sincere piety, and to good morals. Check that forward presumption, so natural to youth, of early thinking that you are wise. No quality can be more an enemy to virtue,

and to every substantial and useful improvement; or more certainly lead to vice and insignificance of character.—Let it be your first and supreme concern to examine the truth, and understand the excellence of revealed religion. I am far from requiring you to be implicit believers. Religion has nothing to fear from the most faithful and rigorous scrutiny. It suffers only from partial and superficial inquiries. Enter into this investigation with an honest love of truth, and with a sincere determination to embrace, and to obey it, wherever it may be found, and however self-denying may be the duties it prescribes. Ruinous and fatal will be the errors into which you will fall, if, on this momentous subject, you content yourselves with a hasty survey, or, only seek for evidence against the gospel, and in favour of your passions.

What can concern you so highly as to know if you are immortal beings, or, if you have no higher hope than to mingle again with the clods of the earth in eternal silence—If God is *just to take vengeance on sin*—or, if *all things come alike to all men*, and there shall, at last, be no difference between the



righteous and the wicked—If there is a Saviour who *taketh away sin by the sacrifice of himself*; or, if, according to the holy scriptures, the impenitent sinner must sink down to everlasting despair covered with all the horrors of unexpiated guilt? All other inquiries should be postponed to these. They regard not only your present peace, but your eternal interests—Not the *honor that cometh from men*, but that which *cometh from God*.

Let not any of you imagine that, because you may not chuse the holy ministry for your profession in future life, the truth or the practice of religion may be of less importance to you than to others. This is preferring decency of character to the discharge of your duty. Besides, although true piety may be less essential to one *profession* than to another; yet, remember, and may the spirit of truth write it indelibly in your hearts, it is equally necessary to you all as you are *men*—as you are immortal—as you are accountable to God—as you are to receive your everlasting destiny from his justice according to the deeds you have done in the body.—But, abstracting from

the considerations of a future existence, religion will form your highest ornament, and your most respectable character, in whatever station you may be placed in life. The reputation of sincere religion is fitted to attract confidence and honor from mankind—What a lustre does virtue shed upon conspicuous talents! How amiable will fortune, or rank, or whatever may elevate you hereafter above your fellow-citizens, appear, if it be adorned with that piety which makes all men equal again by the benevolence and humility of its spirit! “Godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

This subject I have chosen, not from any apprehension that the censures which are due to impiety and vice are merited by you; but from my knowledge of the present state of manners, and the present fashions of opinion. In proportion as our manners daily degenerate, irreligion in principle more and more prevails. All moral and religious opinions, except those that are fixed by revelation, are in a state of perpetual flux and mutability. They have their

fashions and pass away. This is the age of infidel and licentious principles in their most extravagant shapes; and the age to come will look back with astonishment at the folly and madness of the present. Will you risk your salvation on a foundation so unsound and false? Consider the awful interests that depend on the decision which you form on the subject of religion. Examine into its reality, and the right which it claims to command your obedience, with all the seriousness which eternity requires. It is a high claim that comes to you in the name of God, and in the name of your own immortal interests. *The fool alone says in his heart there is no God* to observe his conduct, and to punish his vices, and denies a truth that is borne with such evidence on the whole face of nature, and written in such legible characters on the whole course of providence. For this crime doth the judge of all the earth, at this moment, seem to be punishing the world, and, at the same time, hardening their hearts that they should not discern the cause of their calamities.—**Eternal Spirit of Truth!** rebuke the nations in mercy! Destroy the dark spirit of atheism the offspring and the nurse of crimes!

Illuminate! penetrate our hearts with the sacred principles of piety and virtue! Reveal in our hearts *Christ Jesus the hope of glory!* And hasten the blessed moment when thy victorious grace shall subdue the vices, the errors, and the passions of all men; and *righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea!*

AMEN!

DISCOURSE III.

ON THE DANGERS OF PLEASURE.

 ECCLESIASTES VII. 2.

*It is better to go to the house of mourning than
to the house of feasting.*

SENSUAL pleasures are among the most dangerous enemies of virtue. The natural tastes for them are not culpable, and, within moderate limits, happiness demands them, and reason and religion permit them. But, ardent, and prone to excess, they require to be subjected to a prudent and holy vigilance, and to be indulged with caution and circumspection.—Constant pleasure is not to be expected here. And the continual or excessive pursuit of it, is unbecoming our state in this world. Our path is chequered with evil. If the sanguine but short-sighted hopes of youth picture to themselves

nothing but flowers in their progress, they will soon be pierced with its thorns. If we look round us, we will see misfortune, pain, and death impressing their melancholy stamp on all the best enjoyments of human life. This vale of tears, after a short and uncertain course, leads to the grave, in which we, and all our fellow-travellers shall be successively swallowed up. It is then the part of wisdom, seriously to consider our state, and frequently to look forward, and be prepared for the solemn and interesting close of the present scene. Much pleasure is unfriendly to serious reflection. It dissipates the heart. It engages it in frivolous pursuits, and too often sinks it, at last, in low and criminal enjoyments. Solid wisdom is best drawn from the sober and thoughtful scenes of the house of mourning: for there we learn to make the most just estimate of ourselves and of the world.

The *house of mourning*, and the *house of feasting* are figurative expressions perfectly in the eastern stile designed, the former, to signify those afflictions that call for the sympathy and commiseration of the humane and good; the latter, all high plea-

fures of the sensual kind, especially, if they are accompanied with scenes of festivity.

The manner in which the sacred writer states the comparison between them, strongly suggests the dangerous influence of pleasure. For, however gloomy and painful, especially to the young and gay, the objects may be that are presented in the house of mourning, better it is according to him to make the sacrifices which we must make in conversing with them, and learning the grave and useful lessons which are taught there, than to expose the frailty of youthful virtue to the strong temptations of the house of feasting. This is the observation which I purpose to illustrate and press in the following discourse. For although the text recommends also familiarity with those mournful scenes that call forth the humane sympathies of the heart, and invite reflection on the vanity of the world; yet it equally conveys the instruction which I have stated. And I have chosen to consider it chiefly in this light, because we every where see pleasure acting upon the young with fatal power, and bearing them irresistibly down its impetuous stream.

It is an instruction that deserves from you the higher consideration, because it comes from one who could have no interest to represent religion in a gloomy light—who was not a disappointed misanthrope railing at pleasures which he could no longer taste, nor an austere recluse condemning from his cell enjoyments which he had never known. He was a man acquainted with the world, and by no means averse from pleasure. He had even pursued it to those extremes against which he knew so well to caution other youth: and, when he wrote, was in possession of that power which gave him unlimited command of it in every form that inclination or fancy might demand. Yet this is the author who cautions you against its dangers—for, it weakens that watchfulness and guard which a wise and good man will find it necessary always to maintain over himself—it lays the heart open to too strong temptations—it tends to impair the sentiments of piety towards God—it is unfriendly to the exercise of the benevolent affections—it enfeebles the principle of self-government—and lastly, it is unfavourable to those serious reflections on our mortal condition, and the instability of

human things, so useful to prepare the soul for her future existence, and her immortal destination.

I. Much indulgence in pleasure tends, in the first place, to weaken that watchfulness and guard which a wise and good man will find it necessary always to maintain over the frailty of the heart.

The heart, which is the principle of all that is good or ill in man, requires the most persevering vigilance to guard it against the access of temptation. A habit of profound and serious reflection on ourselves, and on the real state and duties of life is necessary to impose a constant rein upon the passions, and to correct the illusions by which fancy is always ready to aid the errors of the heart. The scenes of delight prepared in the house of feasting are little calculated for these ends. Reflection would mar enjoyments that depend upon the levity and riot of the spirits. Pleasure seldom admits wisdom of her party. The wand of truth which she carries would destroy all those unreal images, and airy visions with which the deluded voluptuary is surrounded.

There the heart is thrown loose from restraint, and laid open to the lively and warm impression of every seducing idea. Gaity circulates from breast to breast, and dissipation is held to be necessary to enjoyment. The senses, the fancy, the passions, all heated and inflamed, hurry it away, deprived almost of the power of resistance. "Keep the heart with all diligence, says the wise moralist, for, out of it are the issues of life." And a good man will find it incumbent on him, in partaking even of the most moderate pleasures, to exert an unceasing self-command, and to preserve a mind always collected, and awake to the sentiments of duty. His emotions he should observe as they begin to rise, he should attentively remark their progress, and be prepared to repress their first tendencies to transgress the temperate and lawful bound prescribed to them by reason, and religion. Examine then on what side you are weakest and most accessible to evil—there fix your principal guard. When the heart is guarded, temptation will assail it in vain. But, when lulled to security by the soothing of pleasure, or transported beyond itself by the vivacity of its feelings, or by the spright-

liness of amusement, it is ever liable to be surprized and overcome. This intermission of vigilance and care is the more dangerous because so seldom regarded as a fault. Men abandon themselves without suspicion to the sweet neglect, and, through the unguarded avenues enter a multitude of enemies who were only lying in wait for this decisive moment.

These dangers affect even lawful and temperate indulgences in pleasure. I speak not here of those who make the house of feasting a scene of riot—who designedly renounce reflection—who sit down to fullness and intoxication, and who rise to lewdness and disorder. On such instruction would be lost. To them dissolute pleasure has done more than break down the fences of the heart, it has destroyed the heart itself. On the other hand, I speak to those who enter the house of feasting with the most innocent intentions—who are not yet prepared to make war upon piety and decency; but, who are not sufficiently acquainted with the frailty of the heart, and the force of the passions. Them I would warn of snares that they do not suspect, and of dan-

gers that may surprize them before they are aware.

II. Pleasure not only impairs the guard which a wise man should constantly maintain over his heart, but often lays it open to too strong temptations.

Temptation, always dangerous to the imperfect virtue of man, is peculiarly so in the house of feasting. There the senses, and the passions become excited, and surround their objects with a seductive colouring. The glow of imagination raises a species of enchantment around the votary of pleasure, and his passions are growing every moment more impetuous and ungovernable.

A good man, who would preserve the purity of his mind, should, as far as is possible for human prudence, avoid those scenes where temptation acquires unusual force; or if, sometimes called to enter them, it becomes him to summon to his aid reason, experience, and all the power of pious sentiment, to prevent the first incautious wandering of the heart and fancy, and to keep

them clearly within that dubious limit that separates vice from virtue. Approaching this critical point, they often kindle with a sudden and unexpected ardor, and hurry him beyond the moderation which he intended to observe. One imprudent indulgence invites another—The gates of the citadel are thrown open, and in rush an host of enemies. Of this David affords us an instructive and affecting example. And we still read with sympathy, and commiseration for his deep affliction, the history of that pious and amiable prince whose latter days were filled with bitterness and tears for having only once incautiously courted a temptation, and once indulged a pleasure, to which he was strongly invited by the prosperity of his fortune.

How much more certainly will pleasure corrupt those who enter its purlieus without circumspection, and expose themselves to all the dangerous force of those temptations that meet the young and unwary in the house of feasting? Here example, sympathy of feeling, the arts of seduction, all the allurements of ingenuity, all the decorations that wit can give to vice, unite their influ-

ence to betray the heart. Here it is that youth so often lay aside their early simplicity and modesty, and turn apostates from virtue. Do you behold a profligate young man? Ask, where was he first corrupted? It was probably in the midst of the pleasures and amusements of the house of feasting. Where did his passions first kindle with a new, and unknown ardor, and his heart form the loose purpose? Was it not in the house of feasting where temptation invited, where appetite impelled, and where the licentious strain of conversation encouraged his wish? Where did he first hear those principles defended that favour the disorders of the passions, and remove from them all the restraints of religion? Where did he learn at length to sport them himself, while, perhaps, his heart yet smote him for his impiety, and falshood? Was it not in the house of feasting whence dissipation had banished wisdom and prudence? where the sons of folly were ambitious of shining by an impious and impertinent wit, and sought admiration from one another by the most frivolous qualities? Where, at last, did principles become totally perverted, and no longer impose any curb upon the licen-

viouſneſs of manners? Was it not in the miſt of thoſe ſcenes of groſs pleaſure where the mind, inveloped in the miſts of paſſion, ſees falſhood as truth—where reaſon, bribed by the heart, defends the innocence of every indulgence—and where the example of others contributes to render it confident in error? Ah! temptation acquires a dangerous, and often a fatal power in the houſe of feaſting—It lurks in all the avenues that lead to it. Youth, who incauſiouſly expoſe themſelves to its ſnares, or yield to its impreſſions, are haſtening to ruin.

On the other hand, does not wiſdom require that we ſhould occaſionally enter into the houſe of mourning, and grow familiar there with thoſe ſerious and thoughtful ſcenes that preſent to us inſtructive leſſons on the vanity of the world? There every object contributes to abate the immoderate ardor of the paſſions, and to divest the allurements to vice of their falſe charms. There we behold all that attracted ambition, or that nourished pride levelled to the duſt. Blaſted perhaps are the objects of unlawful deſire—and the deſires themſelves ſeem, for the moment to be extinguished.

Silent the impious tongue that, profaned religion, and that jested with eternity. Gone to her account that spirit that, in life, may have forgotten her eternal destination, and sought only a vain and momentary happiness among the deceitful and fugitive joys of sense. O my soul! is this the end of all the gilded prospects of vice and folly! If temptation is ever too strong for thee, turn to the house of mourning, and the views that are there presented will correct it.

III. Scenes of pleasure and indulgence tend, in the next place, to impair the sentiments of piety.

The solemnity of the ideas, and the purity of the sentiments which form the spirit of true devotion, illy accord with the light fantastic joys of the house of feasting, or with the dissipations of a sensual heart. Not only do these scenes tend to impair or to set aside the holy offices of religion, but frequently we see them disturb the whole order and economy of life? The regularity of families is deranged—The rational and useful distribution of time is neglected—

Every moment is left to be employed as accident, or caprice may prompt—Hardly any portion remains for the purposes of improvement, or for fulfilling the grave and important duties that belong to us as reasonable men, and as christians—See these giddy children of folly hastening continually from pleasure to pleasure. Hardly are they recovered from the fatigues of one till they are again engrossed in preparations for the next scene, as if these were the great concerns of life. As frivolous and idle as their employments is the whole strain of their conversation—Ah! in the midst of so many vanities, where are the thoughts of God our Maker?

A continual succession of pleasures is apt to efface from the mind that sentiment of dependence upon the Creator so becoming our state. The proud, ungrateful heart of man receives the blessings of divine providence without recognizing their author. He greedily devours them, and then forgets, or spurns the hand that bestows them. Affliction is the school of thankfulness as well as of wisdom. The mind, humbled by suffering, enjoys the smallest mercy with

gratitude; while the richest, by proud unthinking prosperity, is first abused, and then forgotten. If misfortune has not yet touched you, go and contemplate it in the lot of others. There contemplate the frailty of human nature, and the imperfection of all human enjoyments separated from religion. Realize the necessity of making God your friend when the world forsakes you. Men nursed in pleasure feel not the same motives which the weary and afflicted feel to seek a refuge in the bosom of the Father of mercies from the storms that vex the world. In the house of mourning we naturally lift our hearts to God as the friend of the wretched. We see how blessed his portion is whose chief good remains unimpaired amidst the wreck of all his other comforts—and who is able to say, “I will go to God my exceeding joy. In the time of trouble he will hide me in his pavilion. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.”* Such pious emotions are not the natural growth of the house of feasting. The heart, satisfied with the low and feverish enjoyments of sense,

* Psalms xliii. 4—27. 5, 10.

aspires not to seek more pure and spiritual sources of delight. And amidst the pride of life, and in the very theatre of vanity, we shall look in vain for those elevated and holy affections that ally the soul to Heaven, or for those sentiments of humility that connect a dependent being with the Creator.

IV. High and constant pleasures are unfriendly to the benevolent affections. They tend to contract and harden the heart. The importunities of want, the sighs of wretchedness are unwelcome intruders on the joyous festival. How often do the happy thrust from their doors the children of misery, or leave them, like Lazarus, forgotten at the gate? On the lowly and distressful vale of life supercilious prosperity is inclined to look down with indifference or contempt. Having gained an elevation to which the clouds never ascend, it is little moved at the tempests that beat on the cottages below. To whom shall the miserable apply for that sympathy that is necessary to relieve their afflictions? Who are they who are disposed to seek out the retreats of sorrow and distress, and to administer there those consolations which the afflicted re-

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quire? Are they those who have been nursed in the lap of indulgence and pleasure? Are they not those who have themselves been educated in the school of misfortune, and who have been taught, by their own feelings, the claims of suffering humanity? Are they not those who often turn aside from the prosperous course which providence permits them to hold through life, to visit the receptacles of human wretchedness, and to carry comfort into the habitations of penury and disease? Who learn here to feel what is due to human nature?

Pleasure is selfish—attracting every thing into its own center, it loosens the bonds of society. Hence it is that luxury hastens the ruin of nations in proportion as it makes the love of pleasure the reigning character of their manners. Man is rendered social by his wants and sufferings. The mixture of evil in the condition of human life, contributes to unite the world by the most tender and powerful ties. Mankind are linked together, and endeared to one another by the mutual need and exercise of kindness. Perhaps a condition mixed with affliction like the present, and such a disci-

pline of sympathy as we experience in this world, is necessary to cultivate the soul to that high pitch of benevolence, and to prepare it for those exalted unions that shall take place in the celestial state. Seldom will callous prosperity, that has never known a change, deign to shed a tear over the calamities of the unfortunate, and even when prompted by vanity, or urged by shame, it extends a hand to relieve them, it is beneficent without charity. If we would cultivate the benevolent affections, and bring to perfection those humane and generous sympathies which so well become our nature, and are so necessary and so ornamental to our state, we must not dwell frequently or long in the house of feasting.

V. Its pleasures tend, in the next place, to enfeeble the principle of self-government.

Self-denial is necessary to self-command. If our desires are not frequently checked, and always kept within the bounds of moderation, they become, like children spoiled by excessive indulgence, impatient of controul, and prone to every criminal and

dangerous licence. Those who wisely educate youth, accustom them early to restraint, and to submit implicitly to the reason and the will of those whom age and experience entitle to govern, that, when their own reason comes to take the command, they may be able to obey the restraints which prudence and wisdom will find it necessary to impose upon their passions and their conduct. Such is the purpose also of that corrective discipline, by which it pleases divine providence to prepare imperfect men, who are here but in the childhood of their existence, for the state of perfect reason, and of perfect virtue in the heavens. In the midst of moderate enjoyments, and corrected appetites, the sentiments of duty have opportunity firmly to root themselves, and to acquire ascendancy among the other principles of the heart. Unrestrained indulgence corrupts them. And the passions, growing inflamed and ungovernable, hurry away their weak captives over all the fences of prudence as well as of piety.

Moderation and self-denial are not less necessary to the true enjoyment of pleasure than to the proper government of ourselves.

When pleasure is the sole object of pursuit, its enjoyments soon grow insipid by excess. The appetites precipitate themselves upon indulgence, and weary themselves with delight. Hence their gratification is often dashed with disgust, and often followed by remorse. Abstinence is necessary to restore the tone of nature, and to create the highest relish even of the pleasures of sense. When useful employment makes up the main business of life, those moderate and lawful enjoyments that are interposed to unbend the spring of the mind, are tasted with the purest and most exquisite satisfaction. And if occasionally we retire to the house of mourning, its affecting scenes are calculated to nourish that tenderness and sensibility of heart which is the happiest soil in which to plant all the moral, sentimental, and social pleasures.

An important quality in the government of ourselves, is the power of firmness and constancy of mind in enduring the necessary evils of life. Youth, who have always been flattered and softened by pleasure, who have had every desire gratified as soon as it arose, who have hardly known what

disappointment is, are little prepared to encounter those adverse events of Providence, which sooner or later must present themselves to every traveller through this mournful and uncertain pilgrimage.—However serene and pleasant the morning of life may commence, clouds will often overcast the day, or will most certainly cover the evening with darkness and gloom. If your path now winds along a smiling plain in the midst of flowers, it will soon lead you into a barren desert filled with briars and thorns, or present to you frightful precipices from which you will hardly escape. Disappointments you must meet, mortifications you must endure, distressful reverses you ought to expect. What affliction are they preparing for themselves who now will dwell only in the house of feasting? Constant pleasure induces a weakness of mind that augments the pressure of the multiplied and unavoidable calamities that belong to our state. In that case, unlooked for reverses will overwhelm you with a dreadful weight—if you would act your part with dignity in the world, and not weakly sink under its misfortunes, accustom yourself to look forward to its

changes, and seriously to consider the mixed condition of human life. Early learn to forego your own inclinations, when duty requires it; and to preserve them at all times, under the perfect controul of reason. Often enter into the house of mourning, and there meditate on the dark scenes of human nature. Visit the receptacles of poverty and want—attend the couches of disease and pain—listen to the sighs of the friendless and the wretched—look on the melancholy trophies of death—let the cries of mourners who lament the loss of all that was dear to them on earth touch your sympathy—reflect on the tears that are shed in secret, and on the thousand nameless griefs that wring the hearts of the unhappy. By scenes like these chasten yourselves, and, by becoming familiar with affliction, prepare your mind with fortitude to meet those changes which may be reserved for you in the course of divine providence. If it should please God to cultivate your patience and constancy in the school of suffering, regard it as a proof of his paternal care. Every such trial will be disarming for you the force of those great calamities that sink feeble minds to the dust, and preparing you, with calm-

ness and resignation, to approach the close of life, a period so formidable to the soft and guilty sons of pleasure.—The grace of God, sanctifying the heart, and cultivating within it the hope of a blessed immortality, is the only effectual preparative for a peaceful and happy death. But the holy spirit uses as valuable and necessary auxiliaries of his influences, the affecting meditations, and the self-denying duties which I have here recommended. Certain it is that those who form to themselves the most flattering prospects in the house of feasting, and cherish only those gay hopes that are apt to brighten upon them there, must, in the progress of life, meet with many cruel and overwhelming disappointments which they will, by no means, be prepared to endure.

Without a firm and steady self-command, and many self-denials, no great attainments can be made in the best and most valuable qualities of human nature. When pleasure is left to form the character it soon destroys whatever is amiable or respectable in youth. See a young man who has pursued only fashionable amusements! What frivolity,

what ignorance, what conceit, what inanity mark his character, and render him contemptible in the esteem of the wise and good! What an unfurnished mind! what useless talents! what an insipid and unsteady heart! But if he has plunged deep in the stream of pleasure, frivolity and unsteadiness soon become its lightest faults. Loaded with treachery, deceit, and every baseness, it hastens to sink into the dregs of vice. If the bloom and vivacity of youth should cast a veil over these defects for a time, what insignificance, what contempt are they preparing for age!—what melancholy and gloom for declining health, and impotent years!—what bitter, and, at the same time, what vain repentance for a dying bed!

VI. Pleasure is unfavourable, in the last place, to those serious reflections on our mortality, and on the instability of all human things which are so useful to prepare the soul for her immortal destination.

The image of death would frown on the gaieties of the house of feasting, and dash them with unseasonable melancholy.—

Strangely importunate, and unmindful of propriety would he be thought to be who should insinuate a thought of dying where all were devoted to festivity and mirth. Ah! that solemn and eventful moment is hastening on. The riot of the spirits may hide it from your view, but cannot retard it. And, with a fearful surprize it will overtake those who have not expected its approach.

Little more welcome will the thoughts even of the felicities of Heaven find among such scenes of levity and folly. With these, their pure and holy nature cannot be associated. And the heart that adores the one will be cold and indifferent to the other. We are connected with this world by the impressions of sense, and with the world to come only by the power of reflection. Hence, in the house of feasting, where the senses are all heated and inflamed, and reflection almost excluded, the present obtains an infinite advantage over the future. Eternity is forgotten, and the grave at last opens upon us by surprize. As death is the inevitable lot of human nature, and all things here are hastening to a period, how wise would it be often to retire from the circle

of amusement, and to grow familiar with these serious truths in the house of mourning. There we may learn to meet our own change in peace, and be prepared to pass with hope to the great tribunal. There we may cultivate that lively faith in the merciful Redeemer of the world, that will shed light and joy on the valley of the shadow of death, and wholly remove those ignoble and impious fears of dying that discompose the latter end of sinners. There we may contemplate the vain, the transitory, and uncertain nature of earthly things that are unworthy to attach our hearts. It is only when we recollect that we are united to this world by a momentary tie, and to the world to come by eternal relations, that we shall despise, as reasonable beings ought to do, the fantastic occupations of the dissipated and the idle, and cultivate the solid and immortal hopes of piety. These are lessons not taught in the house of feasting. There man seems to possess a power of happiness independent and secure—the vicissitudes, and the period of life, are hidden behind the mists in which sensual pleasures involve the reason. He is lured on step by step, in a fatal oblivion of eternity till the dreadful

moment when he is called all unprepared to plunge into it.

The whole object of the present discourse is to teach us caution and moderation in indulging the pleasures of sense. Universally criminal they are not—On this subject the Creator has indicated his will by the powers of enjoyment with which we are endued, and the objects, evidently designed to gratify them, with which we are surrounded. But, liable to great abuse through the infirmity and corruption of human nature, they require to be restrained by a firm and constant rein. There is a moderate bound within which they are lawful. Cheerfulness is a virtue—though levity is a vice—Amusement, enjoyed as a relaxation from the grave and important duties of life, is to be allowed—dissipation, as an enemy to all good principle, is to be condemned. Temperate pleasures may be rendered favourable not only to the enjoyments, but the duties of life—inordinate indulgence leads to the prostration of every generous and noble affection of the heart. The blessings of providence, tasted with moderation and received with thankfulness,

serve to strengthen the principle of piety—abused to intemperance, they corrupt, and at length, destroy both body and soul.

Life is a serious thing. It is the commencement of an endless being. It is the only period of our probation for immortality. Every action here is impressing some character upon our destiny. And the whole series of our conduct in time is to form the subject of one vast reckoning at the bar of God. Although the cheerfulness of conscious innocence, and the serenity of pious hope become a good man, levity is unsuitable to his state. And frequent entrance into the light and thoughtless scenes of the house of feasting, even in youth, is unworthy a rational and immortal being who is encompassed with such serious prospects, and has duties of such high importance to fulfil. With reserve, therefore, indulge pleasure. Never sacrifice to it one duty either to God, or to man. Preserve, in your lawful amusements, a collected mind, habitually attentive to the great destinations of life. Chasten your joy, knowing that, for every idle word, and for every idle thought, you must render an account.

Remember the presence of God, and join trembling with your mirth.—Look forward to that period, not far remote, when *the sun, the moon, or the stars shall no longer shine on your tabernacle—when the silver cord of life shall be loosed, and the golden bowl shall be broken, when the frail pitcher shall be broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern—then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.** Meditations

* Eccles. xii. This is a fine collection of images in the eastern stile to express the period of life. *The thread of life* is a familiar image in the poetry of all nations, which is here represented as a *silver cord* for its preciousness and delicacy. The only part of the imagery which will be obscure to an American or European reader is the following—*when the pitcher shall be broken at the fountain, and the wheel shall be broken at the cistern.* In the south of Asia and in Egypt, where there were few streams, water, so necessary for the uses and sustenance of life, was sought for in wells, or collected in cisterns. From hence it was drawn with pitchers or other similar vessels, by young maidens, or the daughters of the family, for domestic uses; or, it was raised by a wheel, and distributed into the troughs and reservoirs at which the herds came to drink.—When the pitcher, that had so often gone and returned safe, was at last broken at the fountain—when the wheel, that raised the flood from the cistern, and threw it along the Channels prepared for the cattle, was destroyed, the waters were no longer collected. These refreshing streams, so necessary to the comfort and sustenance of nature, ceased to flow. These circumstances are employed as figures, simple but beautiful, to express the rupture of that frail vessel that contains the fountain of life; or the cessation

on death do not disturb the innocent, they alarm only the guilty conscience—They do not cover life with gloom, and destroy its pleasures, as the licentious imagine—They only render pleasure temperate and wise. Frequently enter into the house of mourning—and, always, when it comes in competition with the house of feasting, give the preference to this school of humanity and seriousness—for *it is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart.*—These seasons of tender and virtuous grief may nourish pious reflections, and bring to maturity the hopes and dispositions of heaven, that would have decayed and perished amidst the ardent and barren pleasures of sense. Happy they who, *by the sadness of the countenance have the heart made better*—who are taught, by the afflictions that are in the world to look far above its transitory

of the action of the heart that throws its precious streams along the channels of the veins. Those who consult the commentators on this passage, will find, in the greater part of them, many insipid and ridiculous criticisms, as if the sacred writer, instead of employing a beautiful poetical image, intended to give us a pedantic and enigmatical system of anatomy.

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and unsatisfying joys, to the eternal habitations of the just and the throne of the living God, in whose *presence is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for ever more.*

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DISCOURSE IV.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

LUKE XVI. 19—26.

“**T**HERE was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day—and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus who was laid at his gate full of sores and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table—moreover, the dogs come and licked his sores. And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by angels into Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, father Abraham! have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip

of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son! remember that thou, in thy life time, receivedst thy good things, and likewise, Lazarus evil things—but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulph fixed; so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us who would come from thence."

This parable contains the moral history of a soft and effeminate voluptuary. His attire, his table, and his equipage displayed the magnificence, and luxury of a prince. *He was clothed in purple, and fine linnen, and fared sumptuously every day.** But, in the midst of that splendor, and self-enjoyment he seems to have forgotten the great end of living. Rendered unmindful of his Creator and of the sufferings of his fellow creatures, by an abuse of mercies derived only from

* Purple was the colour appropriated, in that age, to princely rank. And, as the manufacture of linnen was then only in its infancy, it was not introduced as an article of ordinary dress. The wearing of *fine linnen* therefore was considered as a proof of the greatest wealth, or the greatest luxury.

the goodness of God, and which ought to have been employed to the purposes of piety and charity; he appears to have been intoxicated with his good fortune, and to have ceased to reflect on the uncertainty of human things, and the great interests of his immortal existence. Thus occupied and dissipated, in the moment when he least expected, and was least prepared for the dreadful reverse that followed, he was surprized by death, *and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment.* The prosperity of his first fortune, and the misery of his present condition are the more strongly marked by being opposed to the wretchedness, and the triumphs of Lazarus. It is of little importance to inquire whether this is the history of men who actually lived at Jerusalem; or, whether our Lord hath borrowed only general and probable characters, and worked them into a parable for our instruction. The moral is the same—That we are not to judge of the happiness and misery of men by any external circumstances in which they may be placed in the present life—That piety, though it may seem to be overwhelmed by poverty, by contempt, and suffering here, is found, at last, to be infi-

nitely the happiest choice—That vice, though surrounded with splendor and affluence, and with all the pleasures that affluence can purchase, will appear, eventually, to be a wretched portion—And that *one thing*, above all others, *is needful*. But, as the character of this son of pleasure is not marked in the parable by any high, and atrocious acts of vice, except the want of charity to Lazarus, and sympathy, with his affliction, it may be intended farther to teach us that a voluptuous luxury, a soft and excessive self-indulgence, an ambitious ostentation in the ornaments of the person, the sumptuousness of buildings and furniture, and the richness and splendor of equipage, when they employ our principal cares, are themselves criminal; and, by the neglect which they induce of the highest interests of the soul, are preparing it, in the end, for that fearful destiny so strongly painted by our Lord in this interesting parable.

To represent this destiny, in order, if possible, to deter the children of guilty pleasure from pursuing their fatal career, shall be the principal object of the present

discourse, as it was, probably, the main design of our Lord himself.—I shall previously, however, take a short review of the other, and subordinate instructions that rise out of the history, and that, without doubt, were, likewise, in the view of this great teacher.

The first lesson which we are taught by it is, that we are not to judge of the happiness or misery of men by any external circumstances in which they may be placed in the present life.

The gaiety and splendor that surround affluence, and are ostentatiously displayed by luxury, often deceive the world into a false opinion of the happiness of the men who enjoy them. The votaries of pleasure, as long as they can avoid looking into their own hearts, and into futurity, are themselves deceived on their own subject. But, not to mention that true happiness depends chiefly on the inward state of the mind, and the regulation of its affections by the standard of reason, and the spirit of religion, so contrary to all their habits, let us view their enjoyments in the light only in which they are represented to us in this affecting story. If

they must shortly end in eternal and unutterable misery, what value should we put upon them? Under the face of gaiety, and the high enjoyment of life, are concealed the principles of eternal death. Under an exterior mask of felicity on which are painted satyrs, and syrens, and the images of joyous festivals, are covered the scorpions of a guilty conscience, and the avenging furies of divine justice.

On the other hand, the pains or the wants which a good man may be obliged to endure in the present life, which is but a moment, can take little from the infinite sum of an eternal felicity on which he is the next moment about to enter. Lazarus may be poor—he may lie at the gate of a princely palace whose lord riots in the abundance of his wealth—the dogs may clean the sores of a wretch who, sick with hunger and fatigue, is obliged to accept of that small office of kindness from beasts, which he will look for in vain from the unfeeling pride and luxury of his own species—Lazarus may perish for want—but his pains are only for an instant. Death which seems to be the greatest of them, puts an end to them all.

Angels convey him to everlasting habitations. And the bosom of the father of the faithful receives him from the contempt and injuries of the world. And, in the estimate of our happiness, what proportion is there between a momentary joy succeeded by eternal sufferings, and a momentary suffering succeeded by eternal joys?

When we consider the different destinies of these two men, how strongly, in the next place, do they inculcate this truth, that *one thing is needful!* Is happiness the aim of all the pursuits of men? It is to be found only in true religion. Wealth, power, and sensual pleasure, the phantoms that continually occupy and deceive the world, can add little to the felicity of men when measured on the great scale of immortality.— And if they are acquired by crimes, or are enjoyed without God, their possession is vanity, their end is misery. Look on the dreadful fate of this rich voluptuary and say, *What shall it profit a man, though he gain the whole world, if he lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* When plunged in that devouring gulph, will it be any consolation to him

that he has once revelled in the fulness of sensual joy? Will he not envy the state of Lazarus, poor, despised and wretched, but the heir of heaven? Will he not esteem it infinitely a better portion to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season?

But, probably, this parable was intended, farther, to represent the guilt, and to point out the condemnation of a soft and pleasurable life devoted supremely to the gratifications of appetite, and of vanity. The character of this rich man is not marked by any crimes of notorious profligacy. He inhabited a palace, he was attired with splendor, he enjoyed a sumptuous and luxurious table. His fault seems to have consisted chiefly in an ostentatious luxury, in an effeminate self-indulgence. And there are innumerable duties to the poor, to the church, to our country, to mankind, as well as to God, with which such a life is inconsistent.

By pampering the appetites, and inflaming the passions, it is unfriendly to that self-government, and self-denial which are es-

sential to a life of piety and virtue. And not less is it unfavourable to the virtues of benevolence and charity. High and continual pleasures beget a selfishness of mind that, at last, ceases to feel for the miserable—They nourish a pride that is prone to look down with contempt, or with neglect on the humble and unfortunate—They create a false and fastidious delicacy that is apt to be offended at the view of poverty and wretchedness.—Lazarus, therefore, lies neglected at the gate. If he is not insulted, he is forgotten. It would break in too much upon the enjoyments of this son of pleasure to concern himself about the peace of a wretch. If he listens to a representation in his behalf, the care of furnishing relief is devolved on pampered slaves, who, partaking of their master's fullness, have no sympathy with distressed and friendless virtue. He is too indolent to rouse himself from the lap of ease and indulgence to the active cares of a generous and noble charity.—A high crime this in the eye of God who has an equal care of all his children, and who, in the course of a wise and gracious providence permits the varieties of pleasure and of pain that exist among men

only in order to cultivate in their hearts the noblest virtues, and to unite them together by the sweetest ties.

Equally inimical is a continual succession of sensual delights to the sublime virtues of public spirit. They contract as well as enfeeble the mind. And render it incapable of expanding itself to the great and enlarged interests of religion, of our country, or of mankind. They center it in low and ignoble enjoyments. Innumerable little and selfish cares perpetually engage, and, at length, almost exclusively occupy it. The softness and selfishness of pleasure disqualify a man for those high and arduous services in promoting the glory of God, and the salvation of men, to which a christian may often be called; and render him equally unable, or unwilling, to make those generous and noble sacrifices which the virtues of humanity, of patriotism, or of piety may require. Do we ever expect to hear from the lovers of pleasure this holy and disinterested profession which so well becomes a disciple of the crucified Redeemer—*doubtless I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my*

Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things? Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God? And if we consider those virtues only which are essential to the existence or prosperity of society, can you, in trying situations, trust the integrity, or confide in the patriotism of men who, by voluptuousness, have corrupted and enfeebled their minds, or, by luxury, have probably impaired their principles along with their fortune? And when these vices have infected the mass of a nation all improvement ceases—public enterprize is extinguished—national defence languishes—national honor is betrayed. They have uniformly proved the grave of empires.

But the great evil of this character consists in loving the creature more than the Creator, who alone is worthy of our supreme affection. This is the abundant fountain from which flow all other sins. The love of God is the love of virtue in its source and essence; and is, therefore, the proper and universal principle of duty.

But you see in this unhappy voluptuary, and in those who are daily following his example, a heart devoted to pleasure and vanity, to self-indulgence and pride, in the midst of which God cannot find his proper place. Sensual enjoyments, in the rapid growth of their habits, soon come to occupy the whole man. And the mercies of God, abused by excess, tend only to withdraw the heart from him towards whom they were designed to awaken the liveliest emotions of gratitude, along with the firmest resolutions of duty.

Such are the outlines of a character con-
signed by Christ to so fearful a punishment.
A character highly interesting to the present
age in which we see such numbers who are
lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.
And that degenerate croud is daily increas-
ing with the access of wealth, and the dissolu-
tion of our manners. It is of the more im-
portance to reveal sinners of this description
to themselves, because they are deceived by
a face of beauty and propriety around them;
and the continual flatteries that wait upon
wealth and rank give men a substitute for a
good conscience in the opinion of the world,

and confirm the favourable estimate which they make of themselves by the imaginary estimates of parasites, and sycophants, or of those false friends who are attached only to their fortunes. They are not holy indeed, but they are free from the reproach of great vices. Flattered by their dependents, admired or envied by the world, they are at peace with themselves, and they imagine also that they are at peace with God. Ought they not to tremble, when they reflect that this is the character of the only *reprobate* recorded in the gospel?

Before I exhibit the melancholy and afflicting picture of his state, permit me to observe that, though the parable offers directly to our view the condemnation only of indolence and pleasure, of luxury and pride; yet, indirectly, it teaches us that self-interest, and self-indulgence, in every form in which they can be pursued, exclusively of God, shall, finally, be doomed to the same misery.—The different classes of society are prone to contract and nourish prejudices against one another. And the poor are apt to hear with satisfaction every declamation against the vices of the wealthy

and the great, as if they were exempted, by their situation, from every reproach that touches them. But whoever pursues, or enjoys the blessings of providence without referring them all to God, and acknowledging his goodness in their acquisition and submitting to his will in their application—whoever prefers ease to duty, or interest to charity—whoever is devoted to his appetites, or pursues beyond the moderate bound of virtue, the pleasures of sensuality, or even of amusement, in the coarsest as well as the most refined form—whoever does not mingle a spirit of piety and benevolence with all his occupations, and enjoyments—whoever is not active, faithful, and liberal in his efforts to promote the interests of religion, the glory of God, and the happiness of mankind in that station in which providence hath placed him, although he is not clothed in purple and fine linnen, is guilty of the same crime, and is heir to the same destiny with this proud and wealthy sinner.

That destiny I am now to unfold. And, as it is the principal object of the parable, it will therefore require of you the more patient and serious attention. But, that I

may not wander into regions of unauthorized fancy and conjecture, and thereby detract from that weight which truth and certainty alone can give to every representation that is made, and every doctrine that is delivered from this place, I shall derive the whole of that interesting view which I am about to take directly from the sacred text.

“ It came to pass that the poor man died and was carried by angels into Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried—and, in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham! have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame! But Abraham said, Son! remember that thou, in thy life time, receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulph fixed, so that they who would pass from

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hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us who would come from thence."

In this representation we may remark four sources of misery to this wretched soul—the remote, and hopeless view of the felicities of heaven, which he hath forfeited by his sins—the recollection of past pleasures which now serve only to increase his sufferings—the direct pains of an avenging fire—and, finally, the despair that must spring from the dreadful conviction that his miseries shall have no end.

"He seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom."

In some way which we cannot at present comprehend, it is probable that the glory of the heavenly state will be revealed to the unhappy *spirits in prison*, only to heighten the severity of their sufferings by a knowledge of the felicity which they have lost by their crimes. Those clear discoveries of God, of which the soul in its unembodied state will be capable, may become a source of misery to the reprobate in hell, proportioned to the ineffable happiness that flows

from them to the redeemed in heaven. The presence of virtue even among men commonly confounds vice, and affects it with shame and remorse. And sometimes we have seen the apprehensions of divine justice seizing upon the mind, and concurring with the sense of guilt, overwhelm it in despair. If the imperfect virtue of a worm of the dust can often cover an offender with confusion—if a single ray of the eternal justice of heaven let in upon the guilty conscience can so agitate and convulse the soul, what will be its terror and dismay when all the dreadful splendors of infinite purity, shall be forever present to her view?

From another principle, the discovery of the divine perfection may increase the unhappiness of the guilty who are excluded from it, and are rendered incapable of enjoying it. God is the natural centre of the soul. Towards him she will probably tend, when disencumbered of the body, by a strong and physical attraction as the only source of her happiness, even while a moral discordancy may separate her from him, and an insupportable weight of guilt sink her down to the abyss of impure souls.

Painful and dreadful will be the conflict between these physical and moral tendencies. Often carried out in fervent and inextinguishable aspirations, in sighs and groans to be re-united to the infinite centre and the source of good, she will feel herself repelled from it by the impurity of her nature, and the unchangeableness of her destiny. If, for a moment she seems to rise towards heaven in passionate and distracted wishes, it is only to plunge her, the next moment, deeper in the hopeless horrors of her prison.

The punishment of this miserable sufferer seems also, to have been increased by the most afflicting and involuntary comparisons.—Afar off he sees Lazarus enjoying eternal rest. The wretch who once lay forgotten at his gate, when a prosperous fortune, and continual pleasures made him forget that he was a man, is now clothed with glory and immortality, while he himself lies wrapt in unquenchable fires. Miserable soul! A merciful heaven, and an avenging hell seem equally to concur in his perdition. Imagine what will then be his secret sentiments, or his despairing cries.—Oh! to resemble that man whom once I

would not have set with the dogs of my flock ! What a false estimate have I made of true honor, and of true happiness ! Infinite, folly ! to throw away the immortal prize that was in my offer ! that felicity I might have possessed.—But ah ! I have sacrificed it for frivolous joys that leave nothing real behind them but the distracting sting of their remembrance !

This is the second source of his misery, the recollection of the past.

“ Son ! said Abraham, *remember* that thou, in thy life time receivedst thy good things.” And it is reasonable to believe that he would forever torment himself by an incessant vibration of mind between the past and the present. In a moment all his former happiness, and the whole prosperity of his first fortune, rushes on his recollection—its loss shews it with increase—and again, in a moment, all the horrors of his present state surround him.—Dreadful comparison of what he was, with what he is !—Fortune seemed at my command—my days passed in festivity, my nights in pleasure—perpetual gaieties made up the scene

of life, and seldom was it interrupted by fear or by suspicion. But oh! those fatal joys! Amidst deceiving smiles that banished apprehension, they were secretly leading me to that dreadful precipice from whence they have at length, cast me into this tormenting lake! The mercies of divine providence, which if they had been enjoyed with moderation, and with gratitude, might have prepared my soul for heaven, have, alas! been employed only to nourish this body for the flames that now consume it.

Add to the comforts and pleasures of life, those excellent means of grace with which God may have favoured him for the attainment of his salvation—Possibly, happy natural talents and dispositions—an useful education—a pious domestic example—the counsels and concern of friends, of parents, of the ministers of religion who would have led him to the true objects of duty—the reflections of an improved reason—the admonitions of an enlightened conscience—the instructions of the word and providence of God—and, co-operating with all these, the secret suggestions of the holy spirit. These inestimable mercies,

which are designed to cultivate the soul for the society of the blessed, must aggravate the condemnation of those who resist or despise them. The recollection of abused privileges that once placed him so near the gate of heaven, would urge the sting of remorse the deeper in his breast.

These are the pains of memory. But some more direct punishment by an avenging fire seems to be implied in his bitter exclamation, *I am tormented in this flame.* This is the third circumstance in his sufferings that deserves your most serious attention.

The language of the holy scriptures hardly leaves us room to doubt but that divine justice will employ an elemental fire as a minister of its dreadful decrees on the sinner. And it is of importance to inculcate this truth upon mankind: for, while they conceive that the torments of hell shall consist chiefly in mental pains, sinners, who have been accustomed to manage their conscience in this world, will still hope to elude its reproaches in the next. Suffering gives the chief force to the sentiment of

guilt. And certainly, nothing can be more awful than the denunciations of the holy spirit upon this subject—"The son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and those who do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire. There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."* "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."† "If any man worship the beast—he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone—and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night."‡—Ah! what a picture of misery and despair! The sinner, forever penetrated by avenging fires, finds his being still repaired by an invisible power, and growing again to the flame—forever wasting, yet never destroyed.

* Mat. xiii. 41, 42.

† II. Thess. .i. 7, 8, 9.

‡ Rev. xiv. 9, 10, 11.

In the midst of the fire that is not quenched, is the worm that never dies, and fills those dreadful abodes with eternal *wailings and gnashing of teeth*. Under the anguish of such sufferings, in what fearful execrations will the reprobate children of despair vent the bitterness of their rage, or pour forth their complaints to their unpitying dungeons ! They curse the day that first shone upon a wretched being—they curse the reason that made them capable of sinning—they curse the author of their miserable existence—they curse that existence that makes them only sensible of pain. Their sweetest consolation would be, to be blotted out of the works of God. Ah ! how dreadful is the state that forces them to cry for eternal death, as a refuge from eternal sufferings ! How much more dreadful is it when death invoked will never come !

This is the last circumstance of terror in these sufferings, that they will be endless.

The eternal duration of the punishments of the wicked, in a future state, is declared to us in terms so express in many passages, and is so applied in the whole style of the

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sacred writings, that it requires the most strained criticisms to make them speak any other language. This is among the doctrines which we ought to receive implicitly from the word of God, according to the most simple and obvious meaning of the terms in which it is declared. We are unable to penetrate even by probable conjectures, into the eternal world; and our reason, or our sensibilities must form the most inadequate measures, by which to judge of the moral plans of infinite wisdom, and infinite justice. For proof of this we need go no farther than those innumerable scenes of misery that exist in the present world. What a different system of things would the presumptuous mind of man have prescribed to the wisdom of the Deity? If it were not witness of the facts, would it not have denied the possibility of their existence in the works of an infinitely benevolent being? Incompetent then, as we are, to determine what is wise or good in the boundless and eternal system of the Creator, our wisdom and our safety consists in receiving submissively, and without any modifications suggested by our own feelings, what he hath been pleased to reveal concerning the inscrutable subjects

of eternity, and, especially, concerning the everlasting state of wicked men. Hear then the righteous and fearful decree that shall be passed upon the guilty at the last judgment—"depart ye cursed into *everlasting fire* prepared for the devil and his angels." So *these shall go away into everlasting punishment. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth forever and ever.* The most dreadful idea in the torments of hell is, that they shall be *forever and ever.* *The furnace of the wrath of God* burns with *unquenchable* fire. When the guilty soul surveys the horrors of her destiny, then casts her view forward into futurity as far as her thoughts can reach, but can find no period, no mitigation of her pains—what despair must overwhelm her!—Dreadful is the present! but oh!—the future is hopeless!

Such is the unhappy termination of a life of pleasure and self indulgence, which the history of this rich man presents to us. It paints, in the most affecting colours, the infatuation of those who sacrifice the immortal interests of the soul for the false and fugitive enjoyments of sense. This story conveys a lesson the more instructive, because it

is that of a man who, as far as appears to us, was not profligate, cruel, or unjust. His supreme object seems to have been to enjoy himself. Vain, perhaps, and ostentatious, he lived in splendor and in pleasure. But, in the indulgence of pleasure he seems to have been *forgetful* of his duties to heaven, rather than *impious—inattentive* to the offices of charity, which the necessities of Lazarus demanded, rather than *inhuman—incapable* of the *self-government* and *self-denials* that religion requires, rather than *indecent in his morals*. Yet, at last, you see him make his bed in hell. From the flattering arms of unsuspected joys, he descends to the cruel embrace of everlasting flames. Consider and lay to heart, ye who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, this awful example of the holiness and justice of the Supreme Judge—ye who flatter yourselves that you are innocent as long as you are not profligate—who imagine that, if you preserve your manners within certain boundaries permitted by fashion, and do not openly offend against the sentiments of mankind, you will not be questioned for the graces of the gospel. Ah! look on this miserable *son of perdition* and correct errors so fatal.

It is possible to preserve a fair and decent exterior, to be approved and even admired by the world, and yet be found wanting in the balances of divine justice.

Above all, let those who refuse to listen to admonition or advice in their career of pleasure—who seldom are calm and impartial enough to reason fairly on the pernicious tendency, and fatal termination of their course—who have not sentiment enough to be moved by any representation of the charms of virtue, nor grace sufficient to understand the beauties of holiness, attend to the object presented to them in this parable. It addresses our senses and our fears the only remaining principles by which we can reach the heart when reason is overborne and the sentiments of piety are extinguished in the riot of the passions. For this purpose I have endeavoured to raise up to your view an unhappy spirit from those dismal abodes, that the image of another's misery may bring you, if possible, to timely reflection. You behold in him a preacher who speaks to you from the place of sufferings. You who ask with affected indifference, or with impious levi-

ty what passes in that invisible world, learn it from one who shews you what he is, and tells you what he suffers.—He besought Abraham that Lazarus might be sent to admonish his incredulous brethren of their danger—Miserable soul! that office he performs himself to you. And he raises his voice amongst us to day to warn you lest you also come to that place of torment. Eternal author of truth! add to this awful admonition, the effectual persuasion of thy Holy Spirit!

AMEN !

DISCOURSE V.

THE PENITENT WOMAN AT THE FEET
OF JESUS.

LUKE VII. 37, 38.

And behold a woman in the city, who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with her tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

A COURTEZAN of Jerusalem appears in this history as an humble penitent at the feet of Jesus. In the pursuits of pleasure her passions had overborne that exquisite delicacy of sentiment, and that timid and retiring modesty which, as it is

the principal charm, is also the firmest guard of the virtue of the sex. She had lost even that scrupulous regard to character and propriety of conduct in the eye of the world which is commonly the last virtue which a woman abandons. The disorders of her life were publicly known. But the vivacity of her feelings, which was probably the first cause of her errors, became, when directed by divine grace towards its proper objects, the chief source of that lively contrition, and those tender expressions of attachment to her Saviour, which render her penitence so interesting. She had mispent the generous force of her heart on objects that only deluded and disappointed her. But no sooner had she heard this sublime teacher sent from God, who pointed out to her the true road to happiness, than she renounced her sins, and *attached herself solely* to him. Her repentance became as conspicuous as her vices had been public. Her vanity, nourished by the insidious flatteries of men, she mortified by the deepest humiliations. The feet of her Lord she washed with the tears of her remorse, and her gratitude. Although she was not ignorant of the reproaches, and the sneers she

must encounter in discharging these pious offices from the company assembled at the Pharisee's house, who were acquainted with her former habits of life, yet she resolved to constrain her feelings, and resolutely to meet them all. Her humiliations, her tears, and the sacrifices which she made attest at once the depth of her sorrow for her offences, and the fervor of her love for her Saviour. They shew us a woman of high sensibility; but of a sensibility that, having once been abused, is now the more profoundly penetrated with the sentiments of repentance—that, having once been wasted on vain and criminal objects, attaches itself now with the greater ardor to the chief-good. The advantages of person, and the decorations of art which she had employed to foster vanity, or inflame the passions, she now renounces or neglects. Having once dishonored religion, and offended virtue by the dissoluteness of her manners, she is resolved to make them all the reparation in her power by the publicity of her conversion.—She instructs us therefore by her love—by her humility—by her self-denial—and by her zeal. These are genuine characteristics of sincere repent-

ance: and, by a few reflections on each in the following discourse, I shall endeavor to develop the spirit of a real penitent.

I. In the first place, we discern in her conduct the fervor of her love to the Saviour.

She stood behind him as he lay reclined at the table of the Pharisee, and shed upon his feet a flood of tears. With officious tenderness she wiped them with her hair; and anointed them with a precious perfume reserved for this pious purpose, from the lately abused store of her wealth.* Those offices of hospitality which were expected only from the master of the house,† she per-

* The courtezans of antiquity not infrequently acquired large fortunes. Their dress and furniture were rich. They were commonly distinguished for beauty. And their houses being often places of public resort for men of talents and leisure, they were usually remarkable also for wit. Attention to these circumstances may be necessary in order to perceive the propriety of some expressions in this discourse.

† In that age the master of the house always ordered his guests to be furnished with water for their feet, and frequently with a bath for the whole person before eating, and, after bathing, with ointment with which to anoint themselves. Their posture at table is known to have been reclining upon couches, which explains the attitude in which this woman is represented.

forms herself, and in the manner most calculated to express the fervor of her affection. Those tears were not merely the streams of her repentance for her errors, but the burst of a tender heart overflowing with the love of Christ.

In her pursuit of pleasure she had been unhappy. Deceived, probably, by faithless lovers, and disappointed in every creature of the happiness she had expected from it, she sought only, by perpetual change of object, to fill the painful void which all objects in succession left. Her passions importunate and imperious, having involved her in dishonorable situations, from which she had not the courage to free herself, urged her against reputation, against conviction, and, often, even against her wishes, to the pursuit of new gratifications from which she perpetually returned with fresh proofs of their vanity and misery.

But when Jesus Christ had opened to her the true sources of happiness, and enabled her by the aids of his grace to break her unfortunate and criminal connexions with so many objects that had occupied and

deceived her heart, her affections, that had been dissipated and wasted in a thousand different streams, now collected into one channel, flow to her Redeemer in a full and abundant tide. All her sensibilities here enjoy a lawful, a delightful, and unlimited exercise.

Many considerations would combine to increase the fervor of her devotion. Her disappointments from the world, and the shocks with which her heart had met from her first lovers, would prepare her to return to God as her *exceeding joy*. Her mind was opened, by divine grace, to the discovery and the love of infinite perfection, to which, amidst so many criminal loves, it had hitherto remained blind. Having been conversant only with the vile and detestable forms of vice, the charms of virtue appeared to her with a transcendent and divine beauty.

But, at this moment, she most deeply felt her obligations to her Saviour. Jesus had restored her from the path of infamy to the path of honor. An outcast from society for faults, for which no repentance can

atone among men, she was graciously received by him who knew her heart, and who saw her sincerity. He enlightened her mind—he taught her hopes to aspire—he forgave her offences—he was himself the sacrifice for the sins which he forgave. Awakened to a view of all her guilt, and to the misery and infamy to which her passions had reduced her, ready to despair of the mercy of God, as she had experienced the un pitying censure of the world, with what gratitude and joy would she see herself restored to purity by the word of Christ, and, by his intercession and atonement, made an heir of immortal felicity and glory! Here was the source of those strong emotions, and of those affectionate and assiduous attentions, which she was unable to restrain, even in the presence of men who suspected her motives, and were unfriendly to her character.

This is the history of a real penitent. The love of Christ, and of God through him, now reigned supremely in her heart. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind," is the

law equally of reason and of revelation. Towards that eternal source of intelligence and truth a pure and enlightened reason will seek to bend all her powers. Into that infinite ocean of goodness and benignity, all the little streams of good in man will delight to pour themselves. A mind, therefore, that is truly penitent, and renewed after the image of God, will demonstrate its change by the warm and lively course of its affections towards him. The heart he formed for himself. To withdraw it from him, and to devote it exclusively to other objects is a criminal diversion of its powers. It is, besides, mistaking the means of our happiness to seek it from things so imperfect, treacherous, and inconstant. A man who had amply tried whatever pleasures the world can yield returned from them with the sad experience that *all is vanity and vexation of spirit*. On the fluctuating ocean of life nothing is stable or satisfying; and the restless heart of man, always deceived, yet never taught wisdom by its errors, only abandons one pursuit for another equally vain. When, convinced at last that its infelicity arises, not so much from mistaking its object as from the essential imperfection of

the objects exclusively of God, it returns to him who embraces in himself all that is excellent and perfect in the universe, with what strong and fervent affections will it cleave to him as its chief good? In him it finds a sweet repose from all the agitations and tumults of the world—He is able to fix all its wanderings—He can satisfy the infinity—he can fill the immensity of its desires. He offers to its affections the most sublime of all objects, infinite power, and benignity, infinite purity and truth. The love of God in a good man, seizing upon all the powers of his soul, will mingle itself not only with his devotions, but with all his ordinary occupations. He sees God in every thing that he beholds, he possesses him, if I may speak so, in every thing that he enjoys. The whole world, that was cursed to man by sin, is again sanctified to his use by the spirit of divine love.

But the highest and most delightful exercise of this affection a sincere penitent must find in contemplating his Saviour, and recognizing his obligations to redeeming mercy. Is it possible to believe the truths which are taught in the sacred scriptures concern-

ing the guilt of man, and the incarnation and sacrifice of the son of God, and to feel our own interest in them, and not to be penetrated with the tenderest, and the sublimest sentiments of gratitude and admiration? By his grace, the slaves of sin are *made free with the liberty of the sons of God*—The prisoners of justice are made to *sing of mercy*—the victims of eternal death are made heirs of immortal life!—He hath *redeemed us from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us*, and having borne our sins in his own body on the tree. *O the heighth and the depth, the length and the breadth of the love of Christ that passeth knowledge!* There are moments in which a pious man feels these ideas to be almost too powerful for the feebleness of human nature. No language is sufficient to express the emotions that fill his heart. Like the woman, he weeps at the footstool of divine grace—he would, if possible, kiss the Redeemer's feet. But the burden of his gratitude often makes him dumb, and he gives himself up to unutterable feelings.

Indiscreet acts of zeal in some weak but well-meaning persons, and hypocritical pre-

tensions in others to high fervors in religion, in order to cover unworthy designs, have, with men of reflecting minds, and worldly principles, brought a degree of suspicion on all the visible acts of a warm and affectionate piety. They would reduce religion to a lukewarm profession, and a formal detail of exterior rites in which the heart is not concerned. But, surely, if men be capable of high sentiment, or of strong and tender feelings upon any occasions, the great and transcendent objects presented to us in the gospel should have the power of awakening them in the breast. And the truth is, whatever be the degree of natural sensibility which a good man possesses, it will shine out in his religious profession. Love preserves the same character in religion as in other subjects. It cannot be smothered in the soul. It seeks for means by which to express itself, not only in the fervency of its devotions but in its zeal for whatever is connected with the glory of God, the felicity of mankind, and the progress of piety and virtue in the world. It is superior to a cold and inanimate formality, to which the error, and the practice of so many in

the christian world would confine it. Religion has its forms. But the spirit of divine love puts into them a holy energy and life.

II. This penitent instructs us likewise by her deep humility, which is another essential character of sincere repentance.

Her copious tears, her fine but dishevelled hair applied to the humblest offices, bespoke the lowly sentiments of her mind. No mortifications appeared to be too great for one who felt herself to be, what the Pharisee unkindly called her, *a sinner*. And her whole conduct demonstrates that she ascribed to her blessed Lord alone her deliverance from the shameful slavery of her sins, and that she held herself bound to him by eternal obligations.

Humility is a disposition peculiarly adapted to the state of man whether we consider his frailty, his dependent condition, or the errors and miseries with which he is surrounded. *His days on earth are as a shadow, and he is crushed before the moth.* Sprung from the dust, and born in sorrow,

he is hastening through a vale of tears to reunite himself to the earth from which he was taken. There is little reason for pride in a worm of the dust *who existed but yesterday*; and small cause have we for boasting or confidence in that spark of reason that, struck out of darkness but a moment since by the hand of the Almighty, is hardly sufficient to guide our path through this world; but, to futurity, and the highest objects of our interest and duty, is wholly blind. The most humiliating considerations arise out of every view we can take of human nature. When we compare our imperfection with thine infinite power, intelligence, and purity eternal God! "what is man that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him!"

But the humility of a penitent arises chiefly from a profound and affecting view of his sins against God. The talents of the mind and the faculties of the body, which should have been employed only in the service of the Creator, have been often used to his dishonor. The heart, which he created only for himself, has been devoted to inferior pursuits, and exhausted in falacious and

criminal enjoyments—The blessings of his providence which should habitually have recalled him to mind with a thankful recollection, have too often, alas! served only to nourish and inflame the passions. But the highest aggravation of sin, where the name of Christ is known, is its resistance to the persuasions of the holy spirit, the contempt it pours upon the love of the Son of God, and its profanation of his precious blood shed for the redemption of the world. These considerations most deeply penetrate the mind of a sincere penitent, and fill it with remorse and shame. Condemned by the sentence of the divine law, he is not less condemned by the sentence of his own heart. “Wherefore, saith the sacred writer, speaking in the name of all penitents, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes!”

One of the principal fruits, and one of the most certain proofs of true humility of mind, is an unbounded gratitude to the Saviour and unlimited trust in his merits. In our own imperfect obedience, as there is no vindication of the rights of the violated law, there can be no solid ground of *hope towards God*. For “*our righteousnesses are*

as filthy rags, and our iniquities like the wind have taken us away.’ No argument can carry this truth with such persuasion to the heart that it is “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by grace we are saved,” as our own consciousness in those moments of humiliation and repentance when we perceive the magnitude and extent of our offences against God. Even the mercy that encourages our hope, will, by painting in deeper colours our ingratitude and guilt, the more completely destroy every plea of self-righteousness.—Blessed Jesus! we believe that “there is no other name but thine under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved.”

III. Connected with the humility of the penitent in our text is her edifying self-denial.

Retiring from all the scenes of her past delights she consecrates the powers of her heart, and the labours of her hands only to her Saviour. She esteems it not sufficient to have forsaken her vices; but she makes a voluntary sacrifice of all the objects that might tend to rekindle her passions. Even

those lawful possessions or enjoyments which, having been once abused, had become connected by habit or by memory with her sins, she renounces. Her person, which she had so carefully decorated from improper views, is now neglected in its ornaments—She seems willing to mortify it for having been once too pleasing. The rich perfumes with which she had studied to enchant the senses, she casts away. What is valuable in them she consecrates to Christ—for the rest, she uses them no more for her own pleasure. Her hair, the glory of her head, which she had so often dressed for allurements, now careless and dishevelled, as if to mark her repentance for its first abuse, she applies to the humblest office. The lustre of her eyes, that had so often sparkled with impure fires, she quenches in a flood of tears,* and she now employs them only in expressions of humility and grief.

Admirable example! The spirit of repentance will lead a good man not only to renounce his passions, but to shun the motives and occasions of exciting them—the

* Massillon—La peckereffe de l'évangile.

places which have been formerly the scenes of them—the aids and the arts which they have employed to compass their gratification. In consequence of the natural and powerful principle of association in the human mind, he is prone to regard with abhorrence, or with fear, whatever has been connected, by any close tie, with vice. The concomitants of vice he sacrifices along with the vices themselves. This is likewise a principle of prudence. For such is the frailty of the heart that the most sincere convert may expose his virtue to danger by incautiously frequenting scenes, or by indulging an unnecessary familiarity with objects, that have formerly been to him the occasions, or the ministers of sin. His passions accustomed to kindle at the sight of them, may, by the influence of habit, insensibly become enflamed, and in an unguarded moment, he may be surprised into a fault. It is necessary not only to flee from the sins that are in the world, but often to flee from the world itself. Retirement, self-denial, moderation, and even abstinence in pleasure are frequently requisite in order to preserve our virtue, and to impose a proper guard upon the passions.

A question has been raised, to what degree may amusements, recreations, and generally all sensible pleasures, be lawfully pursued by a good man? And when do they become blameable? It is difficult to mark out any limits on this subject that shall be precise and accurate. They, are not the same, perhaps, to every man—much depends on character, on habit, on the peculiar irritability of the passions, and on many circumstances that vary with the individual, and cannot be embraced in any general rule. Considerations of this nature, while they ought to render a man candid and liberal in his interpretation of the conduct of others, should make him rigorous in judging of his own. Whatever he has found, by experience, to impair the firmness of his pious resolutions, or to discompose the serene and steady habit of his devout affections, to him becomes criminal. And if he has discovered that companies of a certain kind are unfriendly to serious reflection—if public diversions and amusements have dissipated the heart, and rendered it less prepared to approach to God in the exercises of a spiritual and lively devotion—if any worldly cares have occupied too large

a portion of his time to the exclusion of the higher and nobler objects of religion—if attentions to the person have had too much of a sensual aim—if the arts of corrupting have been studied in the arts of pleasing, he will still regard with a holy jealousy and caution what has once proved to him a dangerous snare. He will imitate the prudent and generous self-denial of this penitent woman who renounced even her temptations. It is in vain to ask, is not company innocent? Are not amusements lawful? Is not a certain conformity to the world justifiable? Are not attentions to please laudable? I agree—No one disputes the principle thus generally expressed. It is in the particular applications of it that the difficulties arise. And, whatever indulgences might be admitted in a general theory of morals—whatever, in practice, might be safe and lawful for others, the question recurs, have they been found to produce an ill influence on the state of your mind, or the habits of your conduct? Have they occupied that time which ought to have been employed in pursuits more useful and more worthy of your nature? Have they tended to awaken criminal passions in your

own breast? Have they been designed to excite loose desires in others? In one word, do they seem to have interposed a distance between your soul and God? Have they made you less circumspect in your conduct, and less vigilant over all the movements of the heart? Have they rendered you more forgetful of your dependent state, and of your eternal destiny? In proportion as they have been followed by these effects they have become sinful. And, I repeat it, true repentance will make the sacrifice of them. The spirit of repentance never asks what is the exact limit between virtue and vice, in order that it may approach, as near as possible, the confines of forbidden pleasures. It studies to keep far within that dangerous boundary. It is inclined rather to carry abstinence from pleasure to a holy excess, if I may speak so, than to permit one doubtful liberty. Job *made a covenant with his eyes* in order to guard the purity of his heart. And every man who is honest to himself will perceive some *sin which more easily* than others *besets him*, and with regard to which he finds himself more frail. Here all his guards ought to be doubled—all his vigilance ought to be exhausted. A good

man will fear and shun the opportunities and incitements of temptation, as well as abhor and flee from sin.

IV. This penitent instructs us, in the last place, by the holy zeal with which she avows her change of life, and professes her attachment to her great deliverer.

She had wounded the interests of piety and virtue. She is solicitous, by her future conduct, to repair the effects of her fatal miscarriages. Her course of reformation she commences by a profession of her pious purpose, and an acknowledgment of her duty as public as had been her offences. She did not come to Jesus by night, like the ruler of the Jews who, through a false pride, thought to conceal from the observation of the world, the most honorable action of his life—she did not go to meet him in the distant villages, or, in the mountains to which he often retired apart to pray, that she might reveal to him, in private, the sentiments of her heart—Her offences had been notorious—Jerusalem knew that she was a sinner*—And in that city

* Maffillon.

that had been the theatre of her dishonor, she went by day, in the sight of all into the house of the Pharisee, and, in the presence of the assembly that was there convened, she consecrates herself to the service of Christ. She was not ashamed of the cause of virtue and piety which she had recently embraced. She was ashamed only of having embraced it so late.

An open and decided profession of religion is an homage which every good man owes to the cause of truth. The weight of his example, whatever it may be, he should add to the scale of virtue. A sincere penitent will be solicitous to make an early reparation to the injured honour of his Saviour as conspicuous as his faults have been. But as the habits of the world are, in many respects, in opposition to the spirit of religion, the young convert is apt to perceive a degree of shame in abandoning its party, which is supported by numbers, and going over to the thin and deserted ranks of religion. Yet a lively sense of redeeming love will render him superior to this false shame. Ashamed only of having so long pursued

the paths of vice and folly, he will feel the dignity of a return to reason and virtue.

Do you dread and shrink from the observation of a scoffing and censorious world? Alas! in the course of your vices you feared it not. Why should it affect you only when you are about to enter on the noble resolutions of duty? Do you dread the invidious contrasts that will be drawn between your former manners, and your present change? True it is, the world is prone to call up against those who enter on a new life the memory of their errors. It is willing to reproach religion with them, or to insinuate that pious zeal is merely a hypocritical disguise assumed, for certain purposes, to cover a heart that, in secret, still remains equally enslaved to vice. Thus the Pharisee said of this amiable penitent *she is a sinner*. But, his scorn did not abash her, or restrain, for a moment, the fervent expressions of her duty to her Saviour. The sentiments of love and zeal that filled her heart, rendered her superior to the insult. And let the real penitent know that sincerity will take away the sting of every re-

proach—perseverance in the path of duty will take away the reproaches themselves.

The history which you have been reviewing affords the most gracious encouragement to all men, whatever may have been the nature or degree of their offences against God, to seek his mercy by repentance.—Often, it is not sufficient for the guilty that they have his general promise, “him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” They require it to be supported by examples, before the trembling and self-reproaching heart can rest upon it. Here is the example of one who may be ranked among the chief of sinners, who, notwithstanding, was received by the Saviour with infinite benignity. Appealing to the proofs which she had given of the reality of her repentance, and the sincerity of her love, he says to the Pharisee “her sins which were many are forgiven, for she loved much.”

Not infrequently, those who have offended highly, when they come to be convinced of their sins, are ready to despair of the mercy of heaven. The sentiments of their own unworthiness so profoundly penetrate

them, the apprehensions of the justice and indignation of God against sin so alarm and terrify them, that they have not composure of mind sufficient to turn a calm and believing view on the merits of the Redeemer, and the all-prevailing atonement of the cross. They are ready to conclude that *the summer is past, the harvest is ended, and they are not saved.* Ah! why should you unnecessarily afflict your souls? Behold, in the penitent of our gospel, a monument of divine grace that is calculated to silence all your fears, and is sufficient to introduce the light of pious hope into the darkest and most troubled bosom.

Others there are who, though they do not doubt of the mercy and the promise of God, do, notwithstanding, derive the most disconsolate prospects from within themselves. The force of their passions they perceive to be so great that they can hardly flatter themselves with the hope of being able to bend them under the yoke of religion—their sensibilities to pleasure are so lively and impetuous that they despair of extirpating them, or making them submit to the painful self-denials of the gospel. It re-

quires, indeed, an arduous conflict to subdue the burning impulses of a heart too sensible to pleasure, and to divert its force from the gross and turbulent pursuits of sense to the pure and spiritual enjoyments of piety.—But, if it is arduous, blessed be God! it is not impossible to the energy of reason, to the power of reflection, to the sacred importunity of prayer. A merciful Saviour, also, hath not left the issue of the conflict to our own weakness; but hath graciously promised the aids of his holy spirit to those who ask him—“Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.” And you see in the history of this day, a penitent, whose passions were unusually strong, made, by his grace, to feel the all-subduing charms of virtue and holiness. Those sensibilities which had once misled her, now form the most striking, and interesting features of her new character. Such dispositions, when regulated by divine grace, are commonly distinguished for a tender, lively, and affectionate piety; and are capable, perhaps, of forming the most amiable and perfect characters in religion. To them, probably, we owe those noble strains, those impassioned odes which

the royal psalmist of Israel employed in the worship of God ; those sacred fervors, running through all his divine compositions, that continue to animate the devotion of good men in every age. Let not the strength of your passions, then, or the vivacity of your sensibilities to pleasure, make you despair of attaining to a new life, or even of reaching the summits of virtue. Enter speedily, and in earnest on the arduous labour. And in this, as in every other duty, the promise of God will still remain to be your consolation, and your aid, " my grace is sufficient for you."

AMEN !

T

DISCOURSE VI.

ON INDUSTRY.

DELIVERED ON THE SUNDAY PRECEDING THE
COMMENCEMENT, 1797.

ROMANS XII. 11.

Not Slothful in Business.

THE law of Christ not only reaches to the principles of conduct in the heart, but extends to the whole detail of our active duties. Among these it inculcates industry, and diligence in business, not only by many direct precepts, but by the allusions and images which it employs to characterize the christian life. It represents it as an arduous conflict, as an active race, as a state of incessant labour and vigilance.

Some weak or superstitious minds have imagined that all this ardor is to be employed only in devotion, and those duties that ter-

minate immediately upon God, while they suppose it hardly respects the affairs of civil, of social, or domestic life. On the other hand, justice, charity, sobriety, industry are essential and important duties of the christian law. In the order of life, indeed, they form the most numerous class of our duties, men have the most constant use for them, they are most directly related to the general interest and felicity of the world, which is the great end of the divine government. Activity and diligence in the affairs of life may, it is true, proceed from improper motives, and be directed to improper ends. Men may be diligent in the business of the world, and yet be destitute of the grace of God: but, it may be laid down as an immutable truth in religion that no one can be a good man who is not industrious in some useful calling.

Industry is the virtue of which I purpose to treat on the present occasion; in doing which I shall point out both its necessity, and its advantages. «

It is required of us by God—it is rendered necessary by our relations to society—it

is requisite to the improvement of our own nature—it is intimately connected with other virtues—and it is indispensable to the best enjoyment of life. Each of these ideas I shall explain and extend a little before I apply the subject to the chief design of our present meeting.

I. In the first place, it is required of us by God. This appears not only from his holy word, but from the whole fabric and order of the universe, and from the organization and structure of our own nature, which are his work. Wherever he manifests his power, all things are full of movement and energy. The mighty orbs that compose the universal system wheel on in an incessant course, and preserve unbroken the order of day and night, of seed time and harvest. Every atom is in motion, and is perpetually assuming new forms of being. That man might not be idle, his Creator hath furnished him with a vast assemblage of astonishing powers, fitted for an immense variety of useful ends, and which indeed can be preserved in a sound state and brought to the perfection for which they were evidently intended, only by employment

and exercise. When we see a constant and beneficent activity every where established by God in the constitution of nature, it is an indication of his will too clear and unambiguous to be misunderstood even by the most careless observer. Were the powers with which man is endued given by him in vain? Shall we suffer them to rust in our possession, and thereby frustrate the benevolent designs of the Creator? The opportunity and the means of doing good either to ourselves or others, as they are bestowed by him, and are the indications of his will, point out to us a sacred law of duty. As long as any good end can be answered by our activity, and that is as long as we exist, we are under inviolable obligations to industry.

The same spirit breathes throughout the word of God. Diligence in some useful business is represented as essential to the character of a good man. The apostle, in his instructions to Timothy hath said, "if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel." In describing the character of those widows

whom he permitted to be received upon the charitable lists of the christian church, he requires that they be "well reported of for good works—that they have brought up children, that they have lodged strangers, that they have relieved the afflicted, and that they have diligently followed every good work." To quote no other example listen to the reproach which our blessed Lord makes to the unhappy man who had not industriously improved the talent with which he had been intrusted—"Thou wicked and *slothful* servant!" And let us tremble at the sentence pronounced upon him, "cast ye the *unprofitable* servant into utter darkness—there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." From hence it appears that, in the final judgment, we must render an account of the neglect of our talents as well as of their misimprovement—of our omissions of duty as well as of our positive transgressions.

When, in another passage, our Saviour commands his disciples "not to labour for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life"—can he mean, as some have imagined, to recommend a

pious idleness, or to make a merit of monastic poverty? Can he intend to confine all the images of vigilance and labour by which, in other places, the christian life is represented, wholly to the secret and interior duties of religion?—It is impossible—but knowing how prone mankind are to give the preference to visible and temporal things above those that are invisible and eternal, he intends by this strong expression to cast down the world from its usurped superiority, and to give their just ascendancy in our esteem and pursuit to the objects of an immortal existence. Amidst all our justifiable concerns for the present life, the life to come is of infinitely higher moment, and demands our principal care.

II. Industry is a duty required, in the next place, by our relations to society.

No man liveth to himself alone. We are all members one of another, and are linked together by innumerable ties of mutual interest and dependence. The joint efforts of all are necessary for the happiness of all. Man, as an insulated individual, is capable of little improvement, and even of

little enjoyment. Arts are invented and cultivated, society advances, and is refined, and the public prosperity is promoted only by united labours. Each one is called to contribute his portion to the common stock. Every man, therefore, who is not usefully employed, may be considered as robbing so much from the sum of general benefit and happiness as his labours ought to have added to it. He does more. His example infects the community. And the idle become injurious, not only by their own indolence, but by their pernicious influence.

Who has a right to enjoy the advantages of society if he contribute nothing to maintain and increase them? Shall the wealthy claim this dishonorable privilege, as if being the spring of action in others, and the channels through which the rewards of labour flow to them, *they* might remain idle? No, the ties of reciprocal dependence pervade all orders of the community, and reach, like a mighty chain, from the highest to the lowest. Besides, is it not manifestly unjust that those who enjoy the bounties of providence in the greatest profusion should employ them to the least worthy purposes—

should render themselves the least worthy of men—should suffer their powers to stagnate and degenerate for want of a necessary and useful exercise—should become, by their example, the corrupters of society? If God has elevated them to conspicuous stations, and put into their hands the means of doing extensive good, has he not laid them under proportionally higher obligations than other men to cultivate an intrinsic worth of character, and to co-operate with the great Father of the universe in promoting the happiness of mankind. Can this be effected by an indolent self-enjoyment that takes no interest in the affairs of men? Can it, by a luxurious dissipation in which, though men may be active, they are worse than idle, and active only to pernicious ends?

To the law of an useful industry, therefore, the rich as well as the poor, the great as well as the humble are, by their relations to society and to God, equally and indispensably subject.

But, independently on these high relations, every man is under obligations to in-

dustry from his holy and tender connections with a family. If he has been thrown by providence among the inferior classes of fortune, is it not among the first duties both of nature and religion to make provision for those of his own household, who depend upon his care, or to whom he has been the voluntary occasion of existence? —Whatever station he holds, is it not his duty to exhibit before them a worthy example? With assiduity to superintend their education on which so much depends for their happiness in life? And to throw round them, in that rank which they possess, all the respectability that virtue, talents, and industry can bestow upon them? Without great vigilance and care in forming the sentiments and habits of youth, they are liable to sink into insignificance, or to fall a prey to the innumerable ministers of vice that surround them. Parents are responsible for their children to God, and the public, as well as to their own hearts. For want of that energy and vigilance which a just education requires, how many of the poor have plunged into a low and brutal profligacy? how many families of high fortune have gradually degenerated in the qualities both

of their bodies and their minds, till, at last, the victims of indolence or vice, they have become utterly extinct ?

III. In the next place, industry in some useful pursuit is connected with the improvement and perfection of the powers of our nature.

Continual exercise and employment is necessary to the strength and vigor both of the corporeal, and the mental qualities. This is a law of nature established by that infinite goodness of which we every where see the proofs, and which has intended to promote the perfection of our own nature by means that should be, at the same time, essentially connected with the good of mankind. That action that is most beneficial to ourselves is that which is also most useful to others—Any faculty that remains unexerted becomes, in time, paralyzed and enfeebled, and is hardly capable of being applied to the ends for which nature intended it. The ancients, who understood so well the education of youth, prepared their citizens to become vigorous defenders of their country by the most athletic exercises ; and in their

schools they endeavoured to cultivate the reason and the genius by studies that required an intense and continued exertion of those powers.—Industrious and useful employment, when mixed with proper recreation favours the vigor and perfection of the body, promotes the improvement of the mind, and imparts serenity and purity to the affections. Idleness degenerates every thing; and mere amusement, where *it* occupies a large portion of our time, evaporates the greatest and most respectable qualities of human nature.

Besides, idleness is not only an enfeebling quality but forms also a contemptible character. A man who is not employed as the author of nature intended he should be—whose talents are useless, and whose example is pernicious—who merely eats, and drinks, and sleeps, or lounges from place to place, an inactive burden on the earth, must be despised by the rest of mankind; and he will feel, if he has any sentiment remaining, that he deserves to be despised. The industrious will regard him with suspicion, as a nuisance to society, and as likely to prove at last a burden upon their charity, if they can be fortunate enough to escape his frauds—

The ingenious will look with scorn on that ignoble disposition that can consent to bury the heaven-born spark of reason under a mass of inactive corruption—that has no ambition to excel—and cannot be penetrated with the divine beauties of truth and science—And all must hold in contempt the man who does nothing worthy the rational, social, and human nature.

IV. Industry, is intimately connected with many other virtues.

Order, sobriety, integrity, and temperance in pleasure, are usually associated with industrious merit. When a man's powers are fully occupied on useful objects he is, in a great measure, exempted from the temptations that lead to vice. Labour tends to cool the boiling ardor of the passions, and to introduce among them tranquility and order. Intense application to business, exhausts that irregular and impure fire that is continually drawing aside into vice those who live without proper employment.

Man being formed for action is restless and unhappy without it, and is prone to seek

that excitement from vicious ideas and pursuits which he ought to receive only from beneficial plans and virtuous engagements. His imagination is apt to be filled with loose scenes—criminal desires rise and ferment in his heart—sensual appetites are the only principles that have force sufficient to rouse and occupy him.—If we look back on life, has it not been when we were most idle that we have been most exposed to temptation? Among the idle do we not usually find the slaves of intemperance and debauchery? Among the idle do we not find those who sacrifice honor, conscience, and time, by a base and pernicious gambling, the ordinary resource of people without ideas and without industry. Are they not the idle to whom time seems tedious, and who fly to dissipation to fill the painful void created by want of useful occupation? Do we not among the idle commonly find those who, having wasted their estates, or suffered them, through inattention, to fall into decay, have been tempted to employ dishonest and criminal means in order to repair them? Are they not the idle also who are the tatlers and whisperers of society, and the authors of misunderstanding and discontent between

friends and neighbours. Not feeling the excitement to action that arises from virtuous principles and industrious habits, they abandon themselves to the stimulus of a low and prying curiosity, and their miserable employment is to hear and retail the anecdotes of slander.

But, from no cause are the idle more exposed to danger than from companions like themselves. They mutually mislead and ensnare one another. Their evil habits, and their sinful passions acquire additional force, by being separated from the good, and associated only with the bad. How many do we daily see, falling, by this means, the victims of habitual intemperance? How many, among the poorest classes of society, giving up the active and diligent pursuit of honest, though humble occupations, for the contemptible and ruinous habits of sauntering and tipling, leave their unhappy families to suffer at home? How many who ought to live by their daily labour, do we see turning malicious tale bearers or ridiculous politicians, and regulating, in their pretended wisdom, the affairs of the state, while their own trades are falling into decay? These

men make up the mob of faction in every country—And your idle politicians, your lounging patriots, and men who have embarrassed their circumstances by their own folly and neglect, are always hostile to good government, as if the laws were their enemies, and are ready for any disorder in the republic whenever they can find a wicked and a daring leader.

Honest industry exempts men from the temptations that lead to most, or to all of the crimes which have just been mentioned. Interest, in that case, concurs with inclination to render them sober, peaceful, and orderly citizens—The fermentation of sinful passions is checked by the active labours, either of the body, or of the mind—Secure, in the exercise of their own talents, of a competence always respectable in the esteem of the wise, and possessing sufficient to satisfy the moderate desires that are connected with industry and labour, they feel little inducement, to turn aside to the criminal, precarious, and dangerous resources of knavery for mending their fortune. Along with industry we will generally find sober manners, tranquil passions, modest desires, up-

right designs, benevolent dispositions, a mind superior to fraud, able to rely upon itself, solicitous for the interest of society, and inflexibly attached to duty.

V. I proceed, in the last place, to shew that useful employment is indispensable to the best enjoyment of life.

Idleness, though often sought for that purpose, is an enemy to true pleasure. Enjoyment requires vigor, activity, and a certain spring upon the powers of nature that cannot exist in the langour and lassitude of inaction. The moderate and constant exercise of our faculties is no less necessary in order to taste the satisfactions they are capable of yielding, than it is to bring those faculties to the perfection of which they are susceptible. God hath graciously and inseparably connected the happiness of all sensible and rational beings with the progress and improvement of their nature.—Industry is absolutely requisite to true enjoyment.

After labour, how sweet to an industrious man is that rest that is necessary to refresh him for his work? What a relish does

useful employment give to those innocent amusements with which it is sometimes lawful to unbend nature after the fatigues of duty? What an exquisite pleasure do sound organs, undepraved appetites, simple tastes, temperate pursuits, serene spirits, and all the useful progeny of labour add to every enjoyment of sense? Do the children of idleness and effeminacy know any satisfactions comparable to these?—Their rest is lassitude—their amusement dissipation—their appetites are cloyed, and their tastes blunted by pleasures that continually offer themselves before they are demanded by nature. Luxury wears out, and depraves the appetites it was invented to gratify—and indolence rendering them debilitated and impaired, they can enjoy nothing but in consequence of a thousand artificial provocatives that rouse them to a momentary but diseased action.

Are not these reflections verified by experience? Where do we find those who are most serene—who perceive the most equal and cheerful flow of spirits—and who appear, upon the whole, to have the best enjoyment of life? Is it not among the

industrious and diligent who are always engaged in some proper and beneficial occupation? Where do we find the greatest listlessness, and the most frequent chagrin, and complaints of the heaviness and tediousness of time? Is it not among the indolent? Hardly are they capable of being roused into any enjoyment of themselves but by company, gaming, routs, assemblies. They are ready to die with a distressing langor till the season of their diversions returns—And day after day they repeat the same frivolous and insipid round without taste, without sentiment, without any useful engagement, and with infinitely less satisfaction and true relish of life than the humble labourer who earns his daily bread by the sweat of his brow.

If we turn our reflections to the pursuits of literature we shall find the idle and the ignorant equally far from true happiness. It hath pleased the Creator to connect the most pure and exquisite satisfactions with the love of science, and the attainment of truth. By penetrating and unfolding the system of nature we seem to enlarge our own being, and to approach towards the

supreme felicity of its Author. A man who cultivates liberal knowledge, like him who cultivates piety and virtue, can seldom be dependent on any thing without himself for his happiness. He carries continually with him the most precious sources of it in his own breast. In prosperity, next to the hopes of religion, it is his richest treasure—by it he is enabled to alleviate affliction—it is the ornament of society, and in solitude always a delightful companion—it adorns and ennobles youth—it is the consolation of age—and confers on venerable years respectability and lustre.

On the other hand, ignorance is as void of satisfaction as it is disgraceful in those who have had the opportunity and the means of improvement. Idleness in youth unavoidably lays the foundation of dishonorable manhood, and of despicable age. Nothing can be more contemptible, and often nothing more pitiable, than a vacant old age after an idle and mis-spent youth. Without industrious habits, and without sentiment, taste, or knowledge, it is a miserable void. It has no resource within itself to support the solitude, the want of custo-

mary amusements, and the neglect it must inevitably experience. But age, respectable for its knowledge and example, rich in the reputation of past usefulness, and the honors paid it by the young, may still enjoy its comforts, and at length sink down into the grave encompassed with the consolations created for it by the virtues and industry of early years.

If industry is so necessary to a good life, and if so many benefits flow from it both to ourselves, and to society, as may perhaps appear from the preceding illustrations, you will acknowledge that the duty of the faithful and useful employment of time cannot be too frequently, or too earnestly inculcated upon us either as men, as citizens, or as christians. It is certainly among the best means by which a disciple of Christ can adorn the profession of God his Saviour. Industry is associated with all the useful virtues, idleness with all the disgraceful vices.

I do not mean, however to recommend constant and unremitted labour of body or mind. There is an extreme in the best

things that ought to be avoided. Some intervals we require for relaxation and refreshment, and some may be profitably as well as agreeably devoted to the civilities, and the rational pleasures of society. But these intervals ought to be regulated by the great end of living, and to be made subservient to the higher and more active duties of life, by fitting us to return to them with greater alacrity, and by improving in our hearts the humane and amiable virtues that connect us with mankind.—No portions of our time, however, ought to be guarded, by a good man, with greater caution than these against the access of vice. Into these, if into any it is able to insinuate its poison unperceived. The moments of relaxation and pleasure are, commonly, the moments of our greatest danger. A life of virtue and piety—that is a life worthy of a rational, social, and immortal being, is a life of vigilance, of labour, of constant, useful, and active exertion.

My brethren, I beg your indulgence in the remaining part of this discourse, while, according to an old and laudable custom in this institution, I address a few reflections

and exhortations to the members of that class who are shortly about to be admitted to its honors.

YOUNG GENTLEMEN !

You have now finished the usual course of studies in this seminary; but you have as yet only entered on the threshold of the temple of science. You have completed some years of laborious and honorable application to letters; but if you would arrive at eminence in your respective destinations in future life, your labours are only just beginning. It would be the effect of unpardonable vanity, and the proof of mis-spent time, or of defective talents to suppose that your acquisitions hitherto were more than the most simple elements of science, and humble handmaids to future improvements. Ignorance alone is easily satisfied with its own attainments, because it sees not how much is to be known. Real knowledge, by elevating the mind to higher ground, enlarges its horizon, enables it to discern innumerable openings into the distant and boundless fields of nature that yet remain to be explored, and therefore humbles it with

a discovery of the small progress it has already made. You have hitherto gained little if you have not acquired habits of application, a taste for letters, and an ardent thirst for improvement. With these qualities, what you have attained will prove an useful introduction to the great circle of sciences, and enable you to direct your own future progress in study. Without them you may loose even what you have gained. For, in the steep and arduous road of science there is no point of rest. Unless we advance we necessarily go backwards.

Industry will be essential to your success if you would rise to eminence in any liberal profession, or serve your country with distinction in any respectable department of church or state. One or another of these objects I presume is your aim. I will not suppose that any of you, after the opportunities you have had to elevate and enlarge your views, to refine your sentiments, and to prepare to act an honorable part on the theatre of public life, can prove so unworthy and degenerate as to be contented to drag through the inferior grades of society useless and undistinguished, and to yield the

palm of excellence and merit wholly to others. Shall indolence hereafter destroy the hopes of your parents, the expectations of your country, your own honor, and that high respect which the elevated and virtuous mind ought to have for itself? Shall the degrading love of ease and pleasure, like a blighting mildew, blast your improvements in the bud? and prepare for you a manhood unfruitful of honor, and an old age, if you should live to see old age, vacant of rational and virtuous enjoyment, and stripped of the homage due to useful and well spent years.

You now stand on an eminence from which you should look forward to the period when you shall be ranked among the future legislators, magistrates, or interpreters of the religion, or the laws of your country. When you look through the whole compass of science, by a general acquaintance with which you should prepare yourselves for the discharge of offices so arduous and important, what assiduity and perseverance will even your preparation for public life require?

The time has been in this country when a smattering of knowledge aided by some sprightliness of natural parts would frequently secure to a man in the liberal professions both distinction and fortune. That time is nearly past. And, by reason of the more general diffusion of learning, and the growing multitude of rivals in every art, and competitors for every office, more solid acquirements, and higher qualifications will every day become more necessary for success.

Besides, a mere theologian, or a mere lawyer is an inferior character, and not of difficult acquisition. But to be able to illustrate the sacred writings by all the aids of philology, of antiquities, of criticism, of eloquence, and philosophy—to be the interpreters of justice by a familiar recurrence to the pandects and codes of the most enlightened nations—to draw political wisdom from the history of ages, from an extensive knowledge of human nature and human society, and from so many sages who have written profoundly on that science, this is an arduous labour—this is a character venerable by its powers, its virtues, and its

usefulness; and it is the only one worthy of a generous ambition, or the noble desire of doing good.

Every view you can take of the prospect that lies before you, imposes upon you high and indispensable obligations to industry in those great pursuits to which you have hitherto been only opening a passage. Industry is the law of your nature—it is the command of God—it is necessary in order to cultivate the vast and various field of knowledge that spreads itself out before your view. You are invited to it by the expectations of your country, and by the honors and rewards she has to bestow on useful and conspicuous merit—And you are invited to it by the certainty you may have of success if you are not wanting to yourselves. For a well directed diligence and perseverance will eventually insure success even to moderate talents. And without these qualities the greatest talents will be fruitless. Indeed the principal differences among mankind in point of knowledge and abilities, commonly depend more upon industry, than upon the natural distinctions of genius. A mistaken sentiment often prevails among young

persons, which you will do well to correct, that great industry is the mark of inferior talents, and that idleness and dissipation are characteristics of native genius.*—There is indeed one kind of genius, I mean that which consists chiefly in the liveliness of the imagination, that has not infrequently been connected with dissipated manners. However genius of this kind may sometimes serve to enliven society, or to amuse our hours of leisure, it is little fitted for business and affairs, and is utterly incompetent to philosophic investigation. But that genius that consists in profound and penetrating judgment, that is capable to invent, and improve science, and is really useful to the world, is almost always united with activity in business, and persevering application to study.† By these qualities have the greatest men in every age been highly distinguished. Not to mention the Boyles, the Newtons, and the Lockes of modern times, nor the Pla-

* It is false, and is refuted by the example of the most elevated characters in our own country, as well as in foreign nations.

† This must necessarily be the case. For if truth and science possess charms, must not the understanding that is capable to perceive them delight continually to contemplate them?

tos and Antonines of antiquity, let me recall to your mind only Marcus Tullius Cicero, a name that stands for genius itself, the greatest orator, the greatest statesman, and the greatest philosopher that Rome ever produced. A celebrated and accurate writer of his life says "his industry was incredible, beyond the example, or even conception of our days. This was the secret by which he performed such wonders, and reconciled perpetual study with perpetual affairs. He suffered no part of his leisure to be idle, or the least interval of it to be unimproved; but what other people gave to the public shews, to pleasures, to feasts, nay, even to sleep and the ordinary refreshments of nature, he generally gave to his books, and the enlargement of his knowledge."* Here is an example on which you should be proud to form yourselves—an example that refutes the dull maxims of idleness and profligacy, and points out the real road to greatness and honor.

Along with industry and a laudable emulation to excell, let it be your care to culti-

* Dr. Middleton's life of Cicero.

vate all those virtues that usually accompany diligence and useful employment—order in your studies and in all your duties, by which you may avoid an unprofitable waste of time—frugality in living, and economy in expenditures, qualities which alone are worthy either of religion or philosophy, and becoming the citizens of a free republic—regularity and punctuality in business, so necessary for the convenience and comfort of society—honesty and uprightness in your conduct towards men, which is the basis of our social connexions—piety towards God, which is the foundation of our eternal hopes—Let me add, particularly, sobriety, and temperance in pleasure, which youth have so many temptations to transgress, but which are so necessary in order to preserve and invigorate the powers both of body and of mind. The intemperate indulgence of appetite wastes and enfeebles nature, it empoverishes genius, it weakens the sentiments of probity and honor, it is ready to sacrifice the most elevated prospects of virtue to a low and brutal love of sensual pleasure—and hurries a man almost beyond the power of resistance to the precipice of shame and ruin.—Cultivate an

honorable thirst for knowledge, and let your studies be chiefly of the severer kind, and always accurate and systematic. I mean by *system*, remounting to first principles.—Loose and superficial reading tends to foster vanity and produces little science that is substantial, or can be applied to real use. A course of reading that consists of amusement, principally, such as those fictitious histories which have become so fashionable to the great injury of more solid improvements, weakens and effeminates the mind, renders the taste sickly, perverts the ideas of real life, and disqualifies both men and women for fulfilling with dignity and prudence the duties that belong to them either in their civil or domestic relations. To hope to become scholars or men of business by such light occupations of the fancy, and such gentle agitations of the heart, would be like an attempt to make Greek or Roman soldiers by listening to the soft notes of the flute, or exercising the limbs only in the swimming mazes of the dance.—But industrious application to useful studies tends to cultivate the heart, it ennobles our being—it will prepare for you the public confidence and esteem, and, a motive that will

be much more sensibly felt by young and ingenuous minds, it will fulfil the wishes, and complete the felicity of parents who have every title to your love, and whose happiness next to your duty to God, should be your first pleasure, and your first care.

But, while I am urging your earnest and assiduous application to pursuits useful and honorable in the present life, let me not forget that *one thing is*, above all others, *needful*.

Diligence to make your calling and election sure, is the highest obligation that can be laid upon you as immortal beings. If it is proper to urge, as I have done, your solicitude to render yourselves worthy of that honor that cometh from men, how much more should you be concerned to obtain that which cometh from God? If you should so *labour for the meat that perisheth*, how much more *for that which endureth to everlasting life*?—Compare the fallible tribunal of public opinion before which you are shortly about to appear, with the supreme and impartial bar of God at which you must render an account of all the deeds

done in the body—compare the transient breath that is fleeting from your nostrils, and perishing while we speak, with that immortal existence that survives the grave—Compare the fading and momentary honors of the world, with the eternal and undecaying glories of the heavenly inheritance prepared for his people by Christ Jesus, and can any zeal be too great for such a subject? or any language too strong to press upon you your duty and your interest? All your labours and pursuits in life, your private studies, and your public offices should be made subservient to the chief end of living to the glory of God, and the salvation of the soul. Every duty in life should be animated, directed and sanctified by the spirit of religion. In the great cause of piety and truth *you* should labour with more assiduity and zeal than those who have not enjoyed equal privileges with yourselves. Those privileges have created for you a more extensive sphere in which you should be employed in doing good. And for your encouragement suffer me to remind you that *God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love.* In the immortal kingdom of the Redeemer, *the just shall shine as the*

brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever. All the labours of integrity, of charity, of virtue, of piety, of public spirit, shall be crowned with glory and felicity proportioned to the rich and extensive benefits that flow from them to mankind.

But in your concern to fulfil your duty as christians, and to secure the favour of God your maker, remember that religion must enter into the inmost recesses, and regulate the deepest springs of the heart. It is not sufficient that the external conduct be modified and formed even upon the most decent pattern of human virtue. The exterior may be irreproachable while the principles and the heart are impure.—If you would be worthy disciples of your Master who is in Heaven, *you must be born again*,—enlightened and sanctified by the spirit of divine truth—and united by a vital faith to the Redeemer who is the advocate and head of all his people. Believe it, and lay it to heart, *there is no name under Heaven given among men whereby we can be saved but the name of Jesus Christ alone.* A life of sincere piety is a life of constant vi-

giance and labour in order to *fulfil all righteousness, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.*—Look forward then, my young friends, to the scene that is before you both for time, and for eternity. Enter upon it with firm and ardent resolutions to fulfil its great and interesting duties. Let no labour deter you—let no watchfulness or perseverance fatigue you. But act up to the high character at which you aim of the sons of God, and the heirs of eternal life.—Estimate the immense worth of the soul—contemplate the infinite importance of eternity—lay to heart the hasty flight of these rapid moments that are bearing us on their wings to an everlasting state. In a short time all the duties of life shall be ended—all the honors of the world shall have passed away—all that occupies your cares and affections here, together with yourselves shall be buried in that awful and oblivious gulph that has already swallowed up so many generations of the silent and forgotten dead. Nothing will remain but that immortal substance that can never be extinguished, and the memory of your actions that shall follow you to the tribunal of God, and to your eternal destiny.—Live under the impression of

truths so solemn and affecting; and let all the powers of your nature be engaged in the arduous work of your salvation.

We now press upon the moment that dissolves the interesting relation that has so long connected us. Speaking to you for the last time as your instructor, it is my best, and most earnest advice, and if they were the last words I should ever pronounce, I could only utter them with the greater fervency, *fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man.* Soon death shall forever stop my tongue and close your ears, and then shall we both discern, in infinitely stronger lights, their unspeakable importance.—Go, beloved youth! to your several destinations in life. May the God of your fathers protect and guide you! My wishes, my prayers, and my hopes shall follow you. In hearing of your future virtues and success, I shall partake of the tender and lively joy of your own parents. But Oh! with pleasures unknown, and worthy only of eternity, shall I hear from the lips of your final judge this blessed and merciful decree if he shall pronounce it on your diligence and fidelity in all the duties of life—"well

done, good and faithful servants! enter ye
into the joys of your Lord!"

To that blessed end, Almighty God! in
thine infinite mercy, bring us all, for the
sake of Jesus Christ our Lord!

AMEN!

DISCOURSE VII.

THE LORD'S SUPPER A MEMORIAL
OF CHRIST.

I COR. XI. 24.

Do this in remembrance of me.

NATIONS have endeavoured to perpetuate the memory of great events, or of illustrious benefactors, and individuals to renew the recollection of beloved friends, or of interesting scenes by festivals, by monuments, and by tender memorials. In conformity with customs so natural, and that have been established among mankind from the beginning of time, it hath pleased God, in the various periods of his church, to record signal events of his providence, or peculiar dispensations of his grace by similar monuments and institutions. His gracious covenant with Abraham was perpetuated by a seal impressed upon all his

offspring. And the deliverance of his people from the bondage of Egypt was celebrated by a festival that revived the memory of this illustrious miracle throughout every age. The christian church hath, likewise, its rites, its feasts, and its seals.—Baptism hath succeeded to circumcision as a visible seal of the covenant of grace, and like that, consists of an emblem of the purity of heart that becomes the disciples of Christ. The Lord's supper, which we are convened to celebrate, contains the memorial of a much higher salvation than that of Israel from Egyptian thraldom. It is a festival that exhibits in significant emblems, whatever religion contains most sacred in its own nature, and most interesting to mankind. Our blessed Lord, the night on which he was betrayed, instituted his holy supper to be a perpetual rite in his church, that, by the presence of such lively symbols, he might recall to the memory of his faithful disciples his love, and his sufferings for them —“Do this, said he, in remembrance of me.”

The bread, and the wine employed in this feast are expressive images of the great

objects it is designed to represent. As the bread corn is ground beneath the weight of the millstone, *so was he wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities.* As the wine is pressed from the broken grape, so hath he been cast into the wine-press of divine justice, and broken for our sins.

Our blessed Lord, on that night that preceded the consummation of his great sacrifice on the cross, chose these emblems, and appointed them to be used as perpetual memorials of his sufferings.*—How interesting was that scene! How tender was that moment, when he met the little, and affectionate family of his disciples for the last time! Endearred to them by his labours, by his dangers, and by the ineffable sweetness of his manners—by the sublime and consolatory doctrines of which he had made them the depositaries—by his distinguishing love in selecting them to be ever near his person that they might be the subjects of his divine

* The bread and the wine in this ordinance may be considered as emblems, likewise, of the strength, nourishment, and consolation to be derived from it by a sincere disciple of Christ. But these views of them are not immediately connected with the present subject.

communications, and the heralds of his grace to mankind—himself now hunted down by that world which he came to save—encompassed by malignant enemies thirsting for his blood—surrounded by prospects as gloomy as the shades of that dreadful night, under the cover of which they were convened—just preparing for a cruel death, and about to be separated from his disconsolate followers, he took with them his last supper.—Here every idea that could excite an affectionate remembrance of him, would rush upon their minds, and awaken in them the warmest and the tenderest emotions towards their divine Master while he was celebrating with them the mystery of his own death. And, that the scene might not be effaced from their hearts by the power of time, which impairs every impression, he gave them these precious memorials that they might continually repeat, after his decease, a transaction so full of holy endearment and tenderness.

On such an occasion they would naturally call to mind his *personal qualities* which were the foundations of their esteem—the innumerable *proofs of his love* of which they

had been both the witnesses and the objects—and, lastly, the sacred *relations* that connected him with them.—Such are the ends intended to be answered by tokens given to recall the memory of deceased or absent friends. By reviewing each of these topics we may illustrate the import of this ordinance considered as a memorial of Christ.

I. In the first place, it serves to call to mind his glorious character and perfections as our Redeemer. For, although its principal intention is to be a memorial of his sufferings, yet we take a deeper interest in the pains which he endured when we remember the perfection and glory of his character; and our sympathy, on such an occasion, naturally inclines us to recollect all those excellent and divine qualities the remembrance of which will serve the more deeply to touch the heart with his unparalleled affliction.

Let us then survey this astonishing victim in his *human*, and his *divine* nature—ideas which comprise the whole of what we shall say on this subject.

As a man *he was the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely.* His benevolence was limited by no bounds—he *went about doing good.* His employment and delight were to relieve the poor, to comfort the distressed, to instruct the ignorant, to save the perishing. By this amiable character was he peculiarly endeared to his disciples as the kindest of masters, and the most affectionate of friends—as their guide in every doubt, their support in every trial, the object of their confidence, and the source of all their consolations and their hopes. The most meek of men, he bore the contumely and violence of the Jews with that equanimity and sweetness of temper which exhibited the human character in the most amiable and interesting light. Equally conspicuous for a prudence that never courted danger, and a magnanimity that never feared it, we find him always resigned to the will of God, and manifesting, in the severest trials, the most unruffled tranquility, and the most sublime patience.

These characters of our blessed Lord are called to mind in this ordinance, not only as an example for our imitation, but as

forming the most perfect and interesting object of our trust. The virtues of the man being more within the comprehension of the mind than the infinite perfections of the Deity, which often astonish and confound it, they offer a more definite ground of confidence in the divine promise to the humble and penitent believer, and one that comes more home to the human heart. "Let us therefore, saith the apostle, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in time of need: for, we have not an high-priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities; for he was, in all points, tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

Another consideration of the highest moment is his divine nature. "In him dwelt all the fullness of the God-head bodily." This sublime view of the person and character of the suffering Redeemer should never be overlooked by his disciples in contemplating the scenes of his death. It is this that invests him with the highest glory, that represents in the most astonishing light, the condescensions of his love, and our infinite obligations to his mercy, that renders

him, at once, the object of our worship and our trust,—and it is this that impresses upon all that he has suffered in our room its propitiatory and saving efficacy. It is the true, and the only foundation of our hope, for eternal life. In this holy transaction, my brethren, you contemplate our blessed Lord both as God, and as man. Behold in him, therefore, the most perfect of the sons of men, and *the only begotten son of God!* Behold in him the most interesting and lovely of human virtues, and adore the divine lustre that is shed upon them by the glories of the Deity that dwelt in the midst of them! Behold a high priest who sympathizes with our infirmities by partaking of the same nature! Behold a God who has all power to save!

II. This festival is a memorial, in the next place, of the love of the Redeemer, and of its most affecting expressions to the world. His whole life was one continued proof and illustration of that infinite love which, from eternity, had conceived and prepared the whole system of grace. To represent it truly would require the lan-

guage of heaven. A few only of the faintest outlines I can attempt to trace.

In order to convey even a feeble image of the truth we should be able to compare the glory which he had with his father before the world was, with the degraded and suffering condition to which he submitted for our sakes. "He, who thought it no robbery to be equal with God, made himself of no reputation, and, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself unto death, even the death of the cross."* Infinite condescension! Adorable grace! None but God would have dared to conceive the thought—nothing but omnipotent love could have executed the plans of celestial mercy—the eternal son of the highest became an infant of days! The object of the worship of Heaven herded in a stall with beasts! He who held the throne of the universe had not where to lay his head! The king of angels and of men expired like a slave! And, for whom were all these astonishing sacrifices? For worms of the dust, placed, by nature, at an infinite distance.

* Phil. ii. 6—8.

from the throne of his glory, who might have been blotted out of the universe without notice! For sinners who had turned into rebellion against their maker the powers which he had given them. "God commendeth his love to us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* Oh! "the heighth, and the depth, the length, and the breadth of the love of Christ that passeth knowledge!"† Of this great and interesting subject, a sincere penitent will entertain the most affecting views who is profoundly penetrated with the sentiment of his own unworthiness. Humility exalts the redeemer's grace—turn, then, your meditations, in the same moment, on your own sins, and on the riches of redeeming mercy. Let the waters of repentance and of love flow together. United they form the most precious stream—they fill the soul of the believing communicant with the most tender and sincere joys.

This festival was designed principally to commemorate his sufferings in that last act

* Rom. v. 8.

† Eph. iii. 18.

of his love upon earth when he *poured out his soul an offering for sin*. While he is instituting this ordinance, and, with his beloved disciples, celebrating it for the first time, he presents to our view an affecting spectacle. Placed at the head of his own table as a victim ready to be offered up—casting his view forward to that dreadful scene through which he was about to pass—embracing with ardent affection his afflicted followers whom he was just going to leave—and extending, at that awful moment, his cares to all the future periods of his church, he delivered those symbols as a perpetual memorial of his love, and said, *do this in remembrance of me*. Blessed Jesus! who can forget thee? Remember thee!—Yes, while memory retains her powers—while the heart can beat with sensibility or gratitude—or we have understanding left to distinguish our chief good.

Follow him with a believing eye through all the different scenes of his affliction—see him in the bigotted and disdainful hall of the high-priest loaded with contumely! See him at the unrighteous tribunal of Pilate exposed to the scoffs and indignities of

a furious populace, and, at last, delivered to the barbarity of a cruel executioner!—See him labouring up the hill of Calvary, and fainting under the weight of that cross on which he was just about to be extended!—See his death aggravated by inhumanity and torture, and by all the shame that attends the last moments of the most abandoned malefactor! Admire that wonderful and divine patience which, throughout the whole series of these awful transactions, he manifested under the hands of his betrayers and murderers, at the same time that his power could have crushed them to pieces. *When he was reviled, he reviled not again—As a lamb he was led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb so he opened not his mouth.*

Then was it their *hour, and the power of darkness*. His beloved disciples, dismayed by the terrors of his fate, forsook him and fled. Insulted and beaten, derided and scoffed, his head was torn by thorns that crowned him in cruel mockery, and his body by the direful scourge that lacerated all his flesh. When indignity was exhausted on his sacred person, they drag him like a

A a

felon to the accursed tree. Transfixed with nails, and pierced with the impious and vengeful spear, he hung an agonizing victim on that dreadful altar. Listen to the spirit of prophecy that in vision describes his sufferings—"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels."* "Many were astonished at thee. His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men."† "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet" so dreadful and uncommon was his fate, that we could not regard it as the effect merely of the injustice and cruelty of *man*, "we did esteem him stricken, smitten of *God*, and afflicted."‡

What was visible in his sufferings was infinitely the smallest part. The anguish of dying in him arose, not from mangled limbs and tortured nerves, but from the sense of the holy indignation of God against sin. Although sin was only imputed to him,

* Psalm xxii. 14.

† Isaiah lii. 14.

‡ Isaiah liii. 5.

the punishment was real; for "the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all."* He felt not, indeed, those remorseful horrors that agitate and convulse the conscience of perishing guilt; but the fires of divine justice, entering into his holy soul like a sacrificing flame, consumed it as a *whole burnt offering* for our transgressions. The fury of his insulting enemies, the cruelty and ingenuity of torture he could have borne with serene and unshaken constancy. But abandoned, at the period of his greatest distress, by the consolations of his Father's love, and made to drink the fearful cup of our iniquities, he was overwhelmed, he was utterly exhausted, and seeming, for one terrible instant, to be sinking in despair, he cried out "My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me!"† This dreadful cry was the consummation of his sufferings—the sacrifice was now offered—justice had exacted its claims—the purchase of our salvation was completed—he "bowed his head" and said "it is finished."‡ Astonishing, and almost incredible efforts of divine love! In

* Isaiah liii. 6.

† Matthew xxvii. 46.

‡ John xix. 20.

the moment in which he was about to engage in its tremendous conflicts he instituted this holy festival to call to the recollection of his faithful disciples, to the most distant ages, his sufferings, his sacrifices, and the zeal for their salvation that consumed him. Believers ! can you review this scene, at once so awful, and so tender, without a thousand solemn and interesting recollections ? Do you not feel your bosoms agitated with all the holy tumults of piety while you call to remembrance the affliction of these last moments—the tender compassion with which he looked upon his little and affectionate family whom he was about to leave—the fearful array of death with which he was encompassed—the agonies of the cross—and, what the Son of God alone could endure, the suspension of his Father's presence, and the positive fires of his wrath against sin, which drank up the soul of this divine victim ! *Do this in remembrance of me !*

These memorials of our blessed Lord serve to call to our remembrance not only his glorious character as the Messiah, the Sa-

viour of the world—and the inestimable testimonies of his love to mankind—but

III. In the third place, the important relations which he sustains to us, and the holy ties that consequently connect us with him.

It would be impossible, in the short time that remains to us, even slightly to notice all the relations of Christ to his people which this ordinance may serve either directly, or remotely to bring to view. I shall dwell for a moment only on two—that of our teacher, and that of our Saviour. He was just closing a sublime ministry by which he had established a new dispensation of grace, and a more perfect law of holiness among men—and he was now about to offer that glorious sacrifice that consummated the salvation of the world.

To form a just estimate of the high relation of Christ to his church as its teacher, the divine fountain of light and truth, we should consider the profound darkness that covered the earth before his appearance.—What groveling and fantastical idolatry—

what senseless superstition—what ignorance of the true God, and of all the duties which man owes to his creator—what sensuality, what prostitutions disgraced even their religious worship—what multiplied crimes polluted the nations! The traditions of the primitive religion had been lost in the errors of ages—the lights of nature were extinguished in the general corruption of mankind—the hope of a future existence was well nigh obliterated from the human mind—the philosophers rejected it as a pious vision, and, in the popular religion, the doctrine was so disguised by fiction that it wore the appearance of idle legend and romance. The disciples, who had passed the early part of their life during that dark period before the sun of righteousness arose upon the world, must have listened with uncommon admiration and delight to *a teacher sent from God, who brought life and immortality to light*, and taught them a system of duty unknown to the rest of the world, and at once so rational, and so sublime. The most fervent sentiments of duty must have attached them to this great master in Israel who dispelled the shades of error and ignorance that had covered them, and shed the celestial light of

truth into their hearts. When they saw this heavenly sun about to set, and, in their apprehensions, going to be quenched in perpetual night, a profound grief settled upon their minds. From such a teacher, and such a friend they could not part without the deepest, and the tenderest regrets. And whenever they renewed the memorials of so dear a master, they would recall, with gratitude, and delight, the charms of his divine lessons to which they had so often listened with admiration.

But further, in estimating this relation of Christ as our teacher, let us consider not only the errors of paganism which he chased from the world, but the essential weakness and blindness of the human mind with regard to those doctrines, infinitely more important and interesting than all others to mankind, that contain the knowledge of God, of a Saviour, of an immortal existence, and of the eternal destinies of the righteous, and the wicked. On these subjects feeble and blind indeed is the reason of man when not enlightened from above. All his wisdom is folly; and he can only lose himself in wild conjecture, and anxious uncertain-

ty. How gloomy and disconsolate would life be if we had no certain knowledge, derived from the father of lights, of our origin, our duties, and our destination! Jesus, by opening Heaven to our view, and pointing out the way of salvation, hath shed on our condition in this world its richest consolations. If we are truly sensible of the natural infirmity of the human mind, and the manifold errors to which it is prone, we will recognize with joy *the day spring from on high that hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.** In commemorating, therefore, this last act of the ministry of Christ upon earth, we will thankfully remember him who hath revealed to us the only living and true God, unknown to the Gentile nations—who hath enlightened before us the valley of the shadow of death, that land of darkness and of horrors to the guilty, and hath brought intimately home to the bosoms of his people the assured hopes of everlasting life. Oh! blessed teacher! how little does the arrogance of human reason, or the thoughtless-

* Luke i. 78, 79.

ness of human folly understand the infinite obligations which we owe to thee! O light of the world! shine into our hearts! open them to receive the precious, the consoling rays of divine truth! We remember, we adore thee who, seeming to be extinguished forever in the darkness of thy last hour, didst only veil thy glory for a moment in order to lift it again upon the world with greater splendor!

This ordinance serves, in the last place, to call to the remembrance of the sincere communicant the most precious relation which he sustains to us of our Saviour. For this end come he into the world, and for this end did he submit to suffer, *that he might save his people from their sins.* He is our Mediator, our Advocate with the Father, and the atonement for our transgressions. He holds in his hands the gifts of the holy-spirit, and the rewards of eternal life. How precious to a soul conscious of her impurity, and lamenting her distance from God, is a divine intercessor to lead her to his eternal throne, and to cover her imperfections before the presence of his holiness! With what transports of grati-

tude will she look up from the brink of despair, to which she had been urged by her crimes, to her blessed Redeemer who has all power in Heaven and on earth to save, and whose almighty merits have opened to her the gates of everlasting peace!—In these interesting relations does Jesus appear at the head of his own table celebrating the mystery of his own death. Believers! in these emblems behold your Saviour! The united views of repentance and of faith, of contrition and of hope will give an unspeakable value to the memorials of our redemption. To Christ you owe all. In vain are altars and victims, *thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil to purchase heaven*—in vain the tears and anguish of the perishing sinner to obtain forgiveness—in vain are all the *works of righteousness which we have done* to justify us before God.—His death is the perfect, the meritorious, the only sacrifice for sin, and the only title to salvation. How dear to you, then, will be these symbols and pledges of redeeming mercy that recall to your memory, by the liveliest figures, a relation so precious and important.

Come then, my beloved brethren, disciples of so dear, and so glorious a master, obey his last command, fulfil his dying request. Can you, indeed, require the force of a command, or the authority of a request, to urge you to the discharge of a delightful duty? Will you not press to your lips, and to your hearts the precious memorials of your heavenly friend? While you moisten them with a tender grief for the unutterable afflictions by which his love was perfected,* will you not shed over them the tears of your gratitude for the inestimable blessings of which at that moment, he made you the heirs? Meditate on his amiable character, and his divine perfections—with a melancholy pleasure retrace the unparalleled scenes of his last hour—indulge a holy and a lawful *transport* while you dwell on the ineffable proofs of his love, and listen again to the lessons of heavenly wisdom that flow from his lips.

This holy table is likewise an altar on which you offer your fervent vows to your risen and triumphant Redeemer who is now

* Hebrews ii. 10—59.

ascended far above all principalities and powers, and every name that is named in Heaven and on earth, to hold for you the glorious inheritance which he purchased with his blood:—Over these precious memorials, and with hearts glowing with the sentiments of duty and of zeal, you are called to profess eternal fidelity to him who hath loved us to the death, and who now and ever liveth to make intercession for us. Powerful is the authority of God which commands our obedience, but infinitely more powerful are the voluntary chains of love that hold us in his service. The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge that, if one died for all then were all dead, and that he died for all that they who live should not henceforth live to themselves but to him who died for them, and who rose again. Sweet are its contraints; and from their sweetness arises their force. Entering into the inmost principles of the mind, and mingling, as it were, with all its essence, they form a tie eternal as our being, and indissoluble but with the soul itself. Approach this holy sacrifice, therefore, to rekindle at it the sacred fervours of divine love—to offer your pure vows to Heaven on the same altar on which the Son of God

expired—and to confirm your resolutions of duty over the precious memorials of his death.

Finally, my brethren, estimate your sincerity in this holy duty, by the growing fruits of righteousness in your future life. Consecrate to the service of your Creator and Redeemer, all the powers of your hearts. And remember, that the memorials of your Saviour's love are likewise symbols of that fraternal love that should exist among all christians. As you *partake of one bread and drink of one cup*, so are you connected together by the most intimate unions. See, therefore, that ye love one another with pure hearts fervently. Let no injustice, selfishness, pride, or envy, pollute your intercourse, one with another—*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice—*Cultivate that heavenly wisdom that is *pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy—*Let your mutual charity be remarked to your praise as it was to the praise of those first illustrious disciples who spread the glory of the cross along with its

pure and benevolent spirit, over the whole earth. Blessed Jesus! while we *do this in remembrance of thee, shed abroad thy love in our hearts by the Holy-Ghost!*—breathe on us as thou didst on thy beloved disciples, that we may receive thy spirit!

AMEN!

DISCOURSE VIII.

THE UNITED INFLUENCE OF REFLECTION
AND SACRED READING IN CULTIVAT-
ING AND PURIFYING THE MANNERS.

PSALM CXIX. 9.

*Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed thereto according to thy word.*

TO know wherein virtue consists, and to understand the most effectual means of promoting it, were the principal objects of inquiry among the ancient sages. In conformity with questions which, in that age, were commonly agitated among the wise and learned, the sacred writer asks, "Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?"—What are the best means of cultivating a pious and virtuous habit of life? When he replies, "by taking heed thereto according to thy word," he strongly inti-

mates that the holy scriptures contain the only certain rule, and the most powerful motives of duty. Reason is too vague and uncertain in its conclusions, and too feeble in its authority, either clearly to unfold the law of virtue, or to enforce obedience to its precepts. Philosophy had, in vain, exerted its utmost powers in the ancient world to instruct, and reform mankind. But we find, in the sacred writings, a doctrine most effectual for this end, and superior to all the wisdom of the schools, both for its evidence, and its authority.

This doctrine, applied by serious meditation to the regulation of our conduct, is the best mean of attaining that purity of manners, and that sanctity of heart, which are the ornament of every age, and especially of youth, and to attain which has ever been the great object of the wise and good.

The sacred poet asks this question in the name of the young; probably, because, at the time of composing this psalm, he was himself young*; and because, in this glow-

* Commentators suppose that this psalm was written during his persecution by Saul.

ing and inexperienced age, he felt, with peculiar force, the necessity of a divine wisdom to direct its erring footsteps, and a divine power to controul and sanctify its impetuous passions. It is of the utmost importance to train youth in the habits of piety and virtue, and to enable them early and wisely to regulate their own conduct. For this end two principles are pointed out in the text as singularly useful—attentive consideration of our ways—and careful study and application of the precepts and instructions of the holy scriptures—In other words, *self-reflection*—and *reflection on the word of God*.

The illustration of these principles will form the substance of the following discourse.

I. In the first place, self-reflection is essential to the foundation of a virtuous life. Hence we learn both what to cultivate, and what to correct in our own hearts and conduct. Those who are void of reflection necessarily become strangers at home; and, as happens to men who never look into their affairs, their highest, and most momentous

interests are running into derangement, and they are hastening to ruin without being sensible of their danger. A man without consideration is a fool, ignorant of himself and his most important concerns—he is a wretch, the sport of his own passions, or of the enticements of other sinners—he is a madman who is rushing on destruction, and refuses to open his eyes. What then is implied in *taking heed to our ways*; or, in that reflection on ourselves and our own conduct which is recommended by the sacred writer? It cannot imply less than a careful examination of the *principles*, and a serious attention to the *consequences* of our actions as both are described and displayed in the word of God.

If men do not frequently inspect their hearts, and search the principles of their conduct, the corrupted fountain of nature will continue to flow impure. It is by cleansing the spring that the streams become healthful and clear. But if that source of unhallowed desires and disordered passions is kept covered up from view, and is never examined in order to be purified, will it not be continually breaking forth in sensual af-

fections, in criminal pleasures, in selfish plans, in envy, malice, bitterness, and wrath, in whatever alienates brethren from one another, or, in whatever only unites sinners in the pursuit of crimes? The concealed heart increases its foulness and corruptions by time. Examining its principles, and laying them open to view, is among the best means of correcting them, and rendering them pure. Impurity cannot bear the inspection of our own mind, nor the judgment of our conscience. Corrupted as human nature is, sin cannot be seen in its true colours without shame, nor beheld in its relation to the divine law without fear. Self-reflection is, therefore, a powerful principle of repentance and reformation.

Such inquiries faithfully conducted serve, not only to bring to light, and to condemn concealed vices, but to unmask false and pretended virtues. Frequently the fairest actions are found to flow from motives that vitiate the whole. Hypocrisy may contaminate the most solemn acts of devotion—a regard merely to interest, or to reputation, may preside over apparently the most laudable and honorable discharge of the duties

connected with our respective stations in life. Vain glory may become the principle of those humane and amiable virtues that, in their exercise command the applause of every beholder. Nay, mercenary aims, like a worm at the heart of the fairest fruit, may corrupt and canker even the noblest acts of beneficence and charity. It is only by scrutinizing and sifting our own character that we can separate the clean from the unclean, the pure from the vile, and place virtue on its true and evangelical foundations, the supreme love of God, and the sincere and equal love of our neighbour as ourselves.—The word of God forms the perfect, and the only test of the principles of our obedience. Every other is rendered imperfect by our ignorance, or uncertain by our self-love. According to its holy and unerring dictates, therefore, let us examine, and regulate our conduct. And, happily, it furnishes not only the rule, but the example of our virtue. In the room of every precept is the pattern set us by our Lord Jesus Christ. *Let the same spirit be in us which was also in him*—the same fervent zeal for the glory of God that consumed him—the same profound reverence for the divine presence that

impressed his mind—the same tranquil resignation to the divine will that filled his heart—the same inextinguishable love for his brethren of the human race, for whom he was willing to make the sacrifice of all things, and actually made the sacrifice of his life—the same unspotted purity in thought, word, and deed, that exempted him from every unholy and sensual influence—the same serene and constant view to the heavenly recompence of reward that elevated him above the world, and rendered him incapable of being softened by its pleasures, or dismayed by its sufferings. Such were the characters that adorned the life and conversation of our blessed Lord, and such also should distinguish his sincere disciples. *Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word.* By examining, in the first place, and regulating the principles of the heart—and,

In the next place, by a wise anticipation, and serious consideration of the consequences of his conduct. If men would look forward to the issue of sin either as it is disclosed by experience, or as it is represented

in the infallible word of truth, little else would be necessary to reclaim the vicious, or to restrain their foolish and criminal pursuits. What youth, for example, would plunge into the gulph of intemperance and debauchery if, at the moment, he realized the solicitude, the anxiety, the disease and shame with which these vices shall be succeeded? Or those disgraceful scenes of folly and madness in which they will too probably end? When lust impels, and its temptations invite, would he go, as too often he does, *like an ox to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks*, if he anticipated its disgusts, its filthiness, and riot—the habits of idleness and dissipation in which it involves the profligate—the real insignificance, and the contempt in their own estimation, and in that of the world, into which, at last, it almost inevitably sinks them?

Pleasure not yet tasted appears with untarnished charms, and conceals from our view the pains appointed by nature to succeed it. The passions and appetites gild all their objects as they advance. It is only from behind that their real deformity is seen.

And then, how often is the sinner compelled to look back upon himself with compunction and reproach! How often tormented with painful and ineffectual wishes to be able to recall time, and to correct the errors of the past! Ah! time cannot be recalled—but it may be usefully anticipated. What crimes, what miseries, what public shame, what inward self-reproach might not youth often avoid if, they would look forward to the unhappy fruits that must necessarily spring from a course of vice! If they would take pains to strip the objects of the passions of those delusive charms which an inflamed imagination throws around them! If they would not precipitately abandon themselves to the impulses of rising appetite, or the transports of inflamed desire, but would pause to consider the reflections which reason and conscience will urge upon them when appetite is sated, and all the consequences of their folly are before their view! It is the inconsiderate pursuit of pleasure, without looking forward to the close of the scene that insensibly engages youth in the habits of vice. A comprehensive view of life, and a prudent regard to consequences, would restrain their indiscretions,

or speedily reclaim them from their errors. With what energy of language does the wisest of men urge this argument on the young against intemperance and lust? Speaking of the latter, he saith, "more bitter than death is the woman whose heart is snares and nets."* And of the former, he asks, "Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine—they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright—at the last, it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder"†

Although these considerations are important and serious, and on minds not lost to prudence and honor, and just sentiments of self-respect, will be effectual to restrain the vicious tendencies of the heart; yet, the *word of God* teaches us to extend our views of the consequences of actions beyond the present

* Eccles. vii. 26.

† Prov. xxiii. 29—32.

life, and to consider their relations to the life to come. 'This is the most interesting light in which our conduct can be regarded; and, on all men, it may, and ought to have the most powerful influence in regulating their morals, *and cleansing their way*. When we unite in one view our whole being, and consider the eternal retributions of mercy and of justice which, according to the scriptures, shall be made to the righteous and the wicked, what stronger motives can be urged to men to confirm in them the principles of duty, or to persuade them to repentance? Eternal, undescribable happiness and misery are placed before you. What an infinite advantage lies on the side of virtue and holiness, in opposition to all the transient pleasures of sin! How dearly purchased are its false and momentary enjoyments, if, the next moment, the sinner must lie down in unquenchable fire! "Oh! that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!"* "Rejoice, O young man! in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth—walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes;

* Deut. xxxii. 29.

but, know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment!"* Oh! fatal termination of youthful follies! Let the awful denunciations of the word of God enter into thy heart—they cannot fail to produce in thee sincere amendment of life.

“Wherewith shall a young man cleave his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word.” By this reply the sacred writer intends to recommend not only reflection on ourselves, and on the course and issue of our ways—but

II. In the next place, a careful study and application of the word of God for the direction and government of our conduct.

Some rule for this purpose, either of philosophy, or of revelation, it behoves us to have. Some lights we require to instruct us in our duty—some law to regulate our actions—some effectual motives addressed to the heart, and fitted to engage our attention, and command our obedience. That luminous and perfect rule which the an-

* Eccles. xi. 9.

cient sages pursued with such laborious but hesitating steps in the dark, has been offered to us by the incarnate wisdom of Heaven. And, if we compare the sacred writings with what uninspired reason is able to teach us on the subject of our duties and our hopes, or with what all the schools of philosophy have ever taught, how superior are they in value both as a law of life, and a mean of sanctification.

I am not here to descant on all the excellencies of the sacred writings—the sublimity, and the divine perfection of their spirit—the lights which they have shed upon a benighted world—the consolations which they have in store for the miserable—the mercies of Heaven which they reveal to the guilty. I mean simply to illustrate their superior excellency above every other law that men have discovered or invented, for cleansing the heart, and regulating the life.—It consists

In their purity—in their authority—and in the sublime and powerful motives which they address to the human heart in order to lead it to piety and virtue.

In the first place, in their purity.

Their spirit, and their tendency is to promote perfect sanctity of manners.—Whatever flows from human reason alone will be mingled with human corruption, and tainted by it. Accordingly, in all the systems of morals that have been framed by philosophers either ancient or modern, we find a tincture of the character of the author—some principle that favours vice—some that justifies or excuses frailty. We may commonly determine the ruling passion of the writer from the spirit of his work. But in the divine word we discern a purity worthy the holiness of him who speaks. The spirit of God knows no accommodation with sin, or with frailty. He leaves even no ambiguities in the truth behind which the vices of men may find a protection. All is plain, simple, and most holy. But the word of Christ aims not at regulating the outward conduct merely, but enters into the heart, and sanctifies the source of our habits and manners. “Except a man be born again, saith the Saviour, he cannot see the king-

dom of God."* No incense can be acceptable on his altar but the incense of a pure heart—no streams can be pure that do not flow from a pure fountain—no actions can be approved that do not spring from a holy principle. The holy scriptures cleanse the life by cleansing its inward fountains. A mind illuminated by the word and spirit of God, and a heart renewed in all its principles and affections by his grace, will aspire to higher degrees of virtue than were cultivated by the sages of the world who were contented with being merely citizens. They will aim at a celestial purity accommodated to that mature, and perfect state of being in the Heavens, of which the present life is only the infancy, and the preparatory discipline.

The word of God acquires great value and efficacy as a law of holiness, in the next place, from its high authority.

* John iii. 3.—A principle like this was maintained likewise in many of the ancient schools; and that change of temper and habits which philosophy aimed to produce in its disciples was stiled *regeneration*. But, in spirit and meaning, the doctrine of the schools was far inferior to the doctrine of Christ.

Extremely feeble, in the bulk of mankind, are the dictates of reason as a rule of duty. On many subjects it is dubious and hesitating in its decisions—on many it is easily corrupted and biased by the heart—on all, its conclusions, pursued through a train of deductions which grow less evident at every step, strike with little force upon the mind wherever they are opposed by the vices and passions of men. Were they clearer than they are, reason is too weak to make them obeyed. Of its weakness let me produce a familiar and acknowledged example. Although the principles of justice, that form the basis of society, are among the most evident of its conclusions, is that evidence alone sufficient to procure submission to its rules? Would the mass of men, become good citizens, if they were subject to no other controul than the lights of their own minds? What disorders, what crimes would distract the state, if their own reason were their sole law, and their sole judge! And would they, if they were obedient to no higher authority, become good citizens of that heavenly country whose duties are infinitely more complicated and pure? What, alas! would be their system of reli-

gion? What their law of duty? What the sanctions that would give efficacy to that law, if they were left to derive them all from the feeble lights of their own minds? Obscure, imperfect, and impotent. No, we require revelation to render duty certain, and we require the awful authority of God to give it its full energy upon the heart.

Man was formed to be governed chiefly by authority, in order to promote and secure his virtue. His first opinions and actions are subjected to the wisdom and controul of parents—his early years to the instructions and discipline of teachers. The most reasonable laws of society require to be enjoined by a power superior to his individual will: and the wisest legislators have found it necessary to call in the force of religion to strengthen the bands of social order, and to give complete and efficient energy to their laws. But what is the veneration and obedience which we owe to the most revered and beloved of parents—to the most wise and powerful rulers of the world—to the preceptors that have enlightened our early years—or to the masters of science that govern the opinions of the age,

compared with that which is due to the eternal Spirit of Truth who hath enlightened the law of our duty? To the sacred and awful authority of the Creator and Judge of the universe, added to that law to give it an effectual impression on the heart? The Christian, the believer in divine revelation enjoys infinitely more powerful means of virtue than others who depend only on themselves, or who attempt to follow the erring and contradictory lights every where held out to them by a false philosophy.—When I hold in my hand the sacred volume, I seem to hear the voice of an affectionate parent who, by requiring perfect holiness, has no other end in view but my supreme felicity—I seem to listen to the dictates of unerring truth—I seem to receive the commands of a divine lawgiver who, has all power in Heaven and on earth to save or to destroy—I seem to read the decrees of that holy and omniscient Judge from whom I shall shortly receive my everlasting destiny. What an awful, what a sublime, and sacred authority does the word of God possess! Both youth and age will find in the study of its divine precepts the happiest institution for *cleansing their way*, and

cultivating in them the habits of virtue. Let it be your *meditation all the day*—Let its pure and sacred truths be ever before your eyes—Walk in its heavenly light—And, let it be your guide to the eternal source of light and perfection.

Its influence in sanctifying the heart may be estimated likewise, from the high and interesting motives which it proposes to mankind to reclaim them from vice, and to lead them to virtue. The motives that principally deserve our consideration on this subject, not only for their superior force, but because they chiefly distinguish the gospel from every other moral institution, are the retributions of divine justice to the virtuous and the vicious in a future state of existence—and the infinite mercy of God in the redemption of the world.

Philosophy, in inviting her disciples to virtue can propose to them only the present peace, reputation, or interest that attends it; motives which religion enjoys in common with her, and enjoys in a much higher degree. She cannot look into eternity, or she looks into that profound abyss with a

feeble and unsteady eye, incapable of distinguishing any object. If a few men of elevated virtue, and warm imagination, like Cicero and Plato, entertained a faint hope of existing after the present life, the greater part of philosophers, unable to see any thing certain beyond the grave, believed that, at death, they should cease to be. This principle dissolved at once the strongest ties of moral obligation.* It is the singular glory of the gospel that in it life and immortality are offered to the hopes of the pious. In it, likewise, is denounced the most fearful destiny to the wicked and impenitent. It hath scattered the dark, impenetrable cloud that hung on the hour of death. It hath rendered the future certain as the present, and hath drawn from eternity motives the most sublime to animate and strengthen their virtue,

* When we read the dubious discussions concerning a future state which took place in the Roman senate, in which was assembled all the wisdom and learning of the capital of the world, at the time when they were about to determine on the fate of Cataline and his associates, we are irresistibly lead to deplore the blindness and infirmity of the human mind unenlighted by divine revelation. What motives in aid of virtue were they able to draw from that state which they knew not whether to believe or disbelieve, but were most inclined to deny?—*Sal; de bel. catalin.* Speeches of Cæsar, Cato, &c.

and the most awful to discourage and restrain vice. What can be more awful, or strike the conscience of guilt with deeper, or more salutary fear, than the tribunal of justice—than that day wherein God hath appointed to judge the secrets of all men by Jesus Christ—than the decree by which the guilty shall be consigned to suffer the *vengeance of eternal fire*?—Arrest thy step O profligate youth! In the act of vice pause, and look before thee! Behold the tribunal—the judge—the chains of death—the prisons where the wicked *dwell with everlasting burnings*! Wilt thou, in the intoxication of thy passions brave the terrors of almighty wrath? Are not these views sufficient to palsy all the powers of sin?—Perhaps thou wilt say—it has been often said—fear bear these representations. No man was ever made virtuous by fear alone. But, is it not the first step to virtue to *break off our sins* by repentance? Are not the salutary restraints of fear necessary, in the greater part of men, to prepare the heart for the admission of higher and purer principles?*

* The good influence which the apprehensions of a future judgment, and the punishment of the wicked, even in the imperfect manner in which they were conceived by paganism,

On the other hand, direct thy view to the glorious hope which is proposed in the gospel to animate the good man in the discharge of his duty, and encourage his progress towards perfection. Not the uncertain hope which the prince of Roman philosophers neither could consent to resign, nor was able firmly to hold.* Not the faint and doubtful ray that gleamed on the evening of Socrates and gilded to him for a moment the clouds of death;† but the full assurance of faith—the clear and un-

were supposed, by the best men of antiquity, to have upon morals, may be understood by a remark of Polybius—Book VI. Speaking of the Greeks who, in that age, had been corrupted by the Epicurean Philosophy, he says “If you lend a talent to a Greek, and bind him to the repayment by ten engagements, with as many securities, and witnesses, it is impossible to make him regard his word. Whereas, among the Romans, they are always punctual to the oaths they have taken. For which reason the apprehensions of infernal torments were wisely established; and now to oppose them is wholly irrational.”

* Cicero, reasoning on the subject of immortality with that doubtfulness that must necessarily accompany all our conclusions on this subject that are not derived from revelation, inclines, however, to the probability of a future and happy existence for good men. He adds that this expectation is a source of so much consolation to him, that, if he is in an error in indulging it, he does not wish to be undeceived.

† The hope expressed by Socrates to his friends who came to visit him on the day on which he died, and the doubtful manner in which he uttered it, are well known to every person acquainted with ancient history.

clouded light of the Son of Righteousness.
—Blessed and triumphant assurance! What is this momentary and corruptible existence, compared with that eternal being that shall shine as the stars in Heaven for ever and ever? What are these feeble and gross sensations of pleasure by which we are allied to the beasts that perish, compared with those divine and immortal powers of enjoyment, by which we shall resemble the angels that surround the throne, and, in some measure approximate towards God himself? These glorious rewards of piety and faith, of truth and virtue, are among the most powerful, as well as the most sublime motives to a pure and holy life. Such elevated and immortal hopes tend to raise the affections above the gross and corrupting influence of the world. They tend to quench the flames of lust, to extinguish the rude and wrathful passions, and to cultivate in the heart, that *holiness without which no man shall see the Lord*. Can sensuality debase the soul that expects to approach the throne of God, and to dwell forever in his presence? Can power oppress those whom it hopes to meet as brethren and equals in the kingdom above? Can envy, hatred or revenge, rankle in the bosoms

of those who aspire to the society of the blessed in Heaven among whom reigns only a pure and eternal love?—Are the present rapid moments of our probation, stamping their impression upon our everlasting destiny? Is every instant preparing for us new flames below, or new scenes of felicity and honor above? What diligence and fervency should these considerations add to every act of duty! Will sincere piety raise a worm of dust to immortal glory? How holy ought we to be in all manner of life and conversation!

Finally, religion proposes to us strong additional motives to duty, drawn from the mercy of God in the redemption of the world. They merit an ample illustration, but I can only glance at them in the most hasty manner.

On this subject, reason and philosophy afford us no aid. The gospel alone is able to point out the way in which sinners can have access to their Maker and their judge offended by their crimes, and constrained, if I may speak so, by the perfection of his nature, to punish their guilt. It reveals to us

the love of God in the richest and most astonishing act of mercy that was ever displayed to the universe.—Could I draw aside the veil from the dreadful picture of human guilt, or present to your view the catalogue of our innumerable crimes, I might convey some idea of the infinite grace that was pleased to forego the rights of his justice on man, and to divert its awful thunders to the head of his beloved Son. Could I pluck off the covering from Hell, and disclose its tremendous prisons, the destined abodes of the guilty—could I unfold the gates of Heaven and pour upon your sight the effulgence of that glory *that eye hath not seen, neither hath ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive*, but which is reserved for those who are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, I might enable you to conceive the boundless obligations imposed upon us by his love.

But the most illustrious proof of his love is seen in himself—in his birth—in his life—and, above all, in his death, when *he bore our sins in his own body on the tree*.—Young man!—O young man, immersed in plea-

sure! devoted to thy own enjoyments! forgetful of thy Creator, and thy duty! Look on the Saviour of the world! Can there be a more powerful and persuasive argument to repentance than the love of him *who hath loved thee to the death?* Look on the cruel altar of the cross on which he was made a victim for those sins by which thou art profaning his love! In the view of those bitter sufferings he endured for thee, can'st thou repeat the crimes for which he died!—Hear the voice of divine mercy calling to thee from the Heavens! Listen to the interesting voice that it utters from the cross! Hear the cry of that precious blood that streams from his side, and, calling from the earth, *speakeeth better things than the blood of Abel!* Ah! what motives can touch thee if thou art insensible to these? What persuasions can reach the hardness of age if these are ineffectual on the tenderness and susceptibility of youth! The whole compass of nature cannot furnish arguments to duty, or admonitions against sin equally interesting and strong.—*Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word.*

Having trespassed already on your time, I shall circumscribe within a narrow compass the single reflection with which I design to conclude this discourse.

The subject, to the illustration of which you have attended, recommends to your most diligent study, and your most affectionate esteem this sacred volume from which we derive truths of the highest importance to the tranquility of our own breasts, to the peace and order of society, to the dignity and perfection of human nature, and to our eternal happiness. I speak of it now as containing something more than the most perfect rule of virtue that was ever delivered to the world—I speak of it as embracing the richest treasures of our knowledge, and the noblest sources of our consolation. If we consider the dubious and discordant sentiments of human reason with regard to the existence and perfections of the deity—the means by which the guilty may obtain the forgiveness of sins—the law of our duty—the nature and the certainty of another and a better life, how precious to us should be this system of holy inspiration that resolves these afflicting doubts, and sheds a divine

and satisfactory evidence on subjects the most interesting that can be offered to the reflections, or the hopes of mankind! A fanatical spirit of impiety under the abused name of philosophy has risen up perversely and presumptuously to call in question truths so sacred and consolatory to miserable mortals. Pert and false wit, ignorant youth, and, in an age in which no extravagance is strange, even coarse and illiterate debauchery, venture to hold in derision the belief, the hope, and consolation of the best and wisest men who have ever lived. Christians! in proportion to the madness and folly that are desperate enough to set at naught *the power and the wisdom of God*, should be your adherence to that divine word in which they are so gloriously displayed. How blind and erring would be our footsteps through life if they were not directed by divine truth! What a profound and fearful darkness would rest upon the grave if we were not enabled, by this heavenly light, to penetrate beyond it to a blessed immortality! Let the sacred scriptures, therefore, be the subject of our daily and pious meditation. Let not the cavils of ignorant men, nor the insults of fools

tear from our bosoms these precious lights of duty, and treasures of our hopes.

If you seek wisdom, draw it from these divine fountains—if you cultivate virtue, here you find its perfect law—if you would attain to immortal felicity and glory, from them you imbibe the spirit of Heaven.

O young man! take heed to thy ways according to his holy word. Seek not for companions whose example will encourage thee in vice—whose study it is to prevent reflection, or to furnish to reflection only false and criminal principles to defend a criminal practice. Let not thy passions govern thee in this ardent and inconsiderate period of life, when they require to be kept under a continual rein—let not pleasure intoxicate thee, and impose her illusions on thy reason for truth—hunt not after those pernicious writers whose object it is to inflame the imagination and corrupt the heart. *Take heed to thy way*—pause in thy course—deliberate—reflect. Examine and weigh thy principles. Bring thy conduct to the test of the divine law. Never wilt thou be prepared for the pure mansions of Heaven

till thy virtue, or to speak a language more conformable to the gospel, till thy holiness of heart and life, has reached the perfection of this standard.

O God! in thy mercy arrest the profligacy of this age! Make thy word quick and powerful! Let it penetrate with deep and effectual conviction the conscience of secure guilt, and destroy those deceitful maxims which the hearts of sinners frame only to justify their crimes! Let it triumph over the pernicious principles of a false philosophy, the offspring of our degenerate manners!

AMEN!

DISCOURSE IX.

THE FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

FIRST DISCOURSE—THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE DUTY.

LUKE VI. 37.

Forgive, and you shall be forgiven.

IF you love them that love you, saith the Saviour, what reward have you ?”* There is a natural propensity in the human heart to requite with kindness the favors we have received, and to sympathize with the pleasures and the pains of those with whom we are connected by friendship and esteem. “ But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you.”† This is the sublime of charity. Pride, re-

* Matt. v. 46.

† Matt. v. 44. Luke vi. 28.

sentment, and all the most violent emotions of the breast are ready to rise against those who have treated us with injustice, cruelty, or scorn. When a good man is enabled to forgive the malignity of his enemies, much more will he be disposed to discharge all other offices of benevolence and humanity towards the rest of mankind.

This virtue has justly been said to be peculiar to the christian system. For, although there are illustrious examples of moderation, and forbearance among the great men of pagan antiquity, which approach to the meekness and self-denial of apostles and martyrs, yet are they rare; and the philosophers in general, who studied to cultivate this virtue, aimed rather at the contempt than the forgiveness of injuries—at a superiority of soul that soared above their enemies, than at that meekness and charity that stoops to embrace them with fraternal affection. But whatever approaches a few of the disciples of reason have made towards a doctrine and a practice so sublime and holy, she had, plainly, not authority sufficient to impose it on the pride, and the passions of mankind as an universal law of

duty. This was the office of a divine legislator—of the *teacher sent from God*. And, among the many precepts that raise his gospel far above all other systems of morals or religion that have appeared in the world, that of the forgiveness of injuries, holds a distinguished place. He has enforced it, likewise, by the highest sanction—"For, if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your father who is in Heaven forgive your trespasses."^{*}

The revengeful and the proud are apt to regard this virtue in two opposite lights, either as a perfection above human nature, or as a meanness below it—as implying an elevation of mind and self-command almost divine, or manifesting a pusillanimity unworthy of man. These ideas, I trust, will appear in the progress of this subject, to be equally groundless, in which I shall

I. Point out the extent of the duty—and

II. Illustrate its excellence and reasonableness as a principle of conduct.

* Matt. vi. 15.

I. This duty consists in loving our enemies—in refraining from every purpose of revenge towards them—in readiness to return them kindness for injustice—and, finally, in a disposition to seek every prudent and practicable mean of reconciliation with them.

1. No offence can cancel the original obligation that lies upon all men to love one another. Sprung from the same source—children of one Father who is in heaven—partakers of a common nature—fellow travellers through a dangerous and painful pilgrimage—and heirs of the same immortal hopes, man is connected with man by the strongest and the dearest ties. Although your enemy has broken through those ties, it forms no warrant for you to assist his folly or his madness in tearing them asunder. Charity requires us to distinguish between a man and his actions: and, even when these are most censurable and offensive, to remember that the offender is still a brother. This principle is the vital spirit of the christian religion as it respects our intercourse with mankind, and is the great cement of the universal family of God.

2. As religion requires us to embrace our enemy with benevolence as he is a man, much more does it prohibit towards him every purpose of revenge. Hardly need I speak here of those cruel passions that disturb society by the most atrocious acts.—Hardly need I call to mind those enormities that sometimes flow from pride, from envy, from hatred and rage—those furious wranglings, those bloody contests—those shameful means of private vengeance in which, men, giving themselves up to the violent impulse of their feelings, instead of calmly seeking justice from the authorised tribunals of their country, constitute themselves at once judges and executioners in their own cause. Against atrocities of this kind I may appeal, not only to the mild and benevolent spirit of the gospel, but to the common sentiments of mankind.

There are other ways less flagrant, and that outrage less the divine spirit of charity, by which a revengeful temper may manifest itself. Although there are cases in which even the meekness of christianity will permit a good man to demand his rights in the seats of public justice; yet, if you harraßs your

brother by vexatious suits—Nay, if you prosecute your most just and equitable claims against him with bitterness and animosity—if it is not sufficient for you to obtain redress, unless you can also make him the victim of the laws, you violate the law of Christ. This holy and benevolent law requires meekness and moderation in all our conduct towards men, and that we should rather suffer wrong in matters of inferior moment than seem contentious, or too rigidly exact even our undoubted rights. “If thine adversary sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. If he smite thee on one cheek turn to him the other. If he compel thee to go with him a mile, go with him twain.”*

Revenge may be seen in the social and easy hours of conversation, in acts in which it is hardly suspected. The asperity of your expressions betrays it—it appears in

* Mat. v. 39, 40, 41. These are not absolute precepts. They were proverbial sayings among the Jews, which are never to be interpreted with rigor. They were intended to recommend forbearance to men, and rather to suffer small injuries, and yield their rights in matters of inferior concern, than to contend with the obstinate and selfish.

those eternal complaints of wrongs intended to excite against your enemy the indignation of the world—in those odious or ridiculous pictures which you draw of his vices or his foibles—in your readiness to hear and to circulate every malicious tale against him which calumny has invented. If you do not actually detract from his deserved praise, do you hear it done by others, with a secret pleasure? If you hear his worth approved, are you ready to load it with exceptions, and suspicions? Or do you, by a certain affected reserve and caution express more than you could say? An unholy resentment may be discerned in the most guarded modes of conversation. It may be perceived even in that silence with which a prudent enemy thinks to veil his heart. Would you once have observed, with regard to that person, the same caution? Is it not a sense of injury that has changed in your estimation his good qualities? Or, if you cannot but still discern them, is it not a secret resentment that palsies your tongue, and seals up your lips? Ah! in how many forms of decency, and of virtue even, may this vice lie concealed.

3. True forgiveness implies a disposition to return kindness for injury. "Bless those who curse you, saith the meek and benevolent Saviour of men, do good to those who hate you." That sweetness of temper that is ready to pour its secret blessing on the head of an offender, is a principle allied to Heaven, and peculiarly fitted to prepare the heart to enter, and enjoy those regions of love. It flows from that divine charity that regards all men as the children of our heavenly Father, and an offender only as a mistaken brother. "If thine enemy hunger, saith the apostle, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink : for, in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."* Such proofs of your goodness, and your innocence with regard to him, will melt him in ingenuous sorrow for his precipitancy and injustice, or pierce him with deserved compunction at the view of your superior worth. This was probably the meaning of an ancient philosopher† who, when he was asked by what means a man might be revenged on his enemy, answered "by being better than he."

* Rom. xii. 20.

† Diogenes.

If there be a way in which you can render him a valuable service by speaking well of the deserving parts of his character, by drawing a discreet veil over his foibles, by generously producing his virtues to light, or by advancing his fortunes, you will not only fulfil an elevated duty of religion, but probably attach him to you hereafter as an useful friend.

This precious law of christianity is violated, then, whenever you neglect to render him those services which he needs, and which are in your power to bestow. Is there a respectable office which would be useful to him, and which he is better qualified than another to fill? Is there a profitable employment for his industry which it may depend upon your influence to obtain? Yet, do you exert that influence against him only because you have been offended? Although you enter into no intrigues, and form no plans against him, yet, in the decisive moment of accomplishing or defeating his hopes, and when all may rest upon you, do you oppose him? Nay, although you do not oppose him, do you, through coldness and alienation neglect him,

and let him see that his interests form none of your concern? I see, the world sees in these acts, the proofs of a resentful and unforgiving spirit.—Do you hear his character, more precious than wealth or honor, defamed, when you possess the means of vindicating it? Do you promote the calumny? Do you, by meaning looks and gestures, give significance to suspicion? Do you even, by a cruel silence, assist the designs of his enemies, and enjoy the slander? Do you rejoice in his unmerited calamities? Or, if he has been culpable, do you triumph in his detection and shame? Alas! are not these the characters of an enemy? If you do not pity his misfortunes, defend, where you can, his good name, aid his lawful hopes, and even forget that he has injured you, you have not sincerely forgiven him, nor fulfilled the sacred law of charity that requires us to render good for evil.

4. In the last place, this duty implies a disposition to seek every prudent mean of reconciliation with those between whom and us have arisen any causes of offence. “If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there

remember that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* No worship can be pure that is stained with angry and resentful passions—No prayer can find admission to the throne of grace, while injustice pollutes the conscience, or malice rankles in the breast. A sincere christian, who possesses the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, will be grieved if, at any time, he has given even involuntary offence; and if, through prejudice, or the surprise of passion, he hath, by word or deed, occasioned an injury to his brother, he will be solicitous to repair the wrong. He will not disdain to make those necessary explanations, or even those concessions which may be requisite to place their harmony upon its first footing, and to cement it, if possible, with new endearments. Nay, where a brother is to be gained, he will not too rigorously examine his own rights, but will display a certain generosity in his advances, the dictate of a benevolent heart, conscious of the purest intentions.

* Mat. v. 23—24.

This subject may be farther illustrated by pointing out the false principles upon which reconciliations often proceed, or the mistaken substitutes that are put in the room of the sincere forgiveness of injuries.

1. Parties at variance we sometimes see brought together by the address and management of common friends. To their instances at length they yield. But, observe with what reluctance they meet—what mutual coldness and distrust they betray at every step—how many explanations must be made—how many punctilios must be adjusted—how many compromises must be attempted, in order to save a false sentiment of honor? Do you believe that you have fulfilled the celestial law of charity by a reconciliation that has proceeded upon these grounds? No—even the world is not deceived. It sees that you are not friends. It perceives in your conversation, in your conduct, in your whole manner, the coldness of your hearts.

2. Men sometimes mistake the mere subsiding of the passions, which is the effect of time, for the forgiveness of injuries which is

the fruit of charity. The edge of their resentments is blunted, and they sink down by degrees, and almost without design, into the ordinary offices of good neighborhood.—In the various and capricious changes of the world, an accidental concurrence of interests sometimes re-unites those whom difference of interest had divided. But these principles have nothing in them in common with the generous warmth and kindness of the christian temper. The spirit of the blessed Jesus regards a forgiven enemy like a brother reconciled : and an enemy who refuses to be reconciled it regards with those sentiments of meekness and benediction that can flow only from a heart touched and animated with the love of God.

3. Not infrequently, a cold return to the external civilities of society is mistaken for the duty I am recommending, while you still cherish a keen remembrance of injuries you have received.—*I forgive him, you say, but I do not forget. He has no reason hereafter to rely on my friendship.* Ah! this hint is too significant. We discern in it a rankled and wounded mind. Does the mild temper of the gospel thus swell the breast

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with a proud resentment? No—it tends to unite the hearts of men by the sweet and attractive sympathies of charity, and not merely to connect their persons by the loose and vulgar ties of ordinary association. The civilities practised by a good man are the sincere expressions of a benevolent mind, not a hypocritical mask intended to veil from the world passions which he is ashamed to avow. Conscious that God inspects his heart, he studies not to cover dispositions there which he is not willing to expose to the pure and holy light of heaven, and which will not assimilate him to its blessed society.

4. Prudence is frequently substituted for charity. Men smother their resentments merely to prevent the derangement which they would produce in the circle of their society, or to escape the uneasiness that must arise to themselves from a perpetual course of hostilities.

5. But the last substitute which I shall mention, for the forgiveness is the contempt of injuries.—Well may innocence feel its superiority to the indiscretion of unfriendly

tongues, and the malignity of evil intentions. And the calm dignity of virtue is consistent with the gentleness and meekness that become a christian. But contempt, involving, as it too often does, the offender with the offence, is an unholy temper. It indicates a pride, and haughtiness of mind incompatible, equally with the charity, and the humility of the gospel. Vice, when considered as offering its temptations to us, may, by a noble mind, be regarded with contempt—when seen in the conduct of others, it ought rather, by a good man, to be beheld with pity.

Reserving for another discourse the illustration of the excellence and reasonableness of this disposition as a general principle of conduct, I shall conclude the present with a single and brief reflection.

The forgiveness of injuries is inculcated throughout the discourses of our blessed Lord and his apostles with peculiar frequency and earnestness. For, it is not only the highest exercise of that charity which they lay at the foundation of all our duties to mankind; but it is absolutely necessary to

the peace of the world, to extinguish, or prevent the action of those innumerable causes of dissention that are continually springing up in human society. Did every man conceive himself entitled to avenge his own quarrels it would convert the world into a theatre of violence and blood. In order to prevent this fatal effect, the wise, the moderate, and the good are called, not only to abstain from doing injury, but daily to cover with the mantle of forgiveness the injuries that are offered to them. Injustice, fraud, envy, malice, wrath, whispering, tattling, slander would keep the world in a perpetual flame, and fix our own peace forever on the rack, were not their influence counteracted by this exalted principle of charity. But, when we consider, on one hand, the force of the passions, and, on the other, the infirmity of the mind, may we not exclaim with the apostle, on a different occasion, "who is sufficient for these things?" To forgive like a christian seems to require both a greatness and humility of mind, a meekness and equanimity of temper almost beyond the present frail condition of human nature. But, we may reply, with the same apostle, "I can do all things through Christ who

strengtheneth me." Let this high and arduous duty, therefore, be the subject of our fervent and continual petitions at the throne of grace. The great Teacher of the church hath incorporated it in that excellent and comprehensive prayer which he hath left to be the perpetual rule of our devotions. Frequently, indeed, it requires all the energy of prayer, to calm and subdue the tempest of our passions—It requires that profound sense of the divine presence which is cultivated in prayer to impose upon their fury an effectual curb—It requires all the humility of penitents prostrate at the footstool of mercy to repress in the heart that obdurate and unhallowed pride which is the chief support of our unforgiving resentments.

Finally, this duty forms one of the best tests of the heart. Men may more easily deceive themselves with regard to the general duties which they owe either to God, or to mankind. But if you can bear injuries with patience—if you can maintain a mild and amiable serenity under reproach and calumny—if you can forgive offences most deliberately committed against you,

and return kindness for injustice, and *blef-
sing for railing*, it is the highest evidence
of the complete subjection of the passions to
the government of reason, and of the do-
minion of that principle of divine love in
the heart which is the true foundation, and
the animating spirit of every duty.—I do
not ask if you are without passions? nor
if they are not naturally quick and strong?
These may be found in the best and noblest
characters—but, if the power of religion
has been able to subdue them, and to hold
them under its soft and gentle rein? If, like
Christ on the agitated and stormy lake, it
has been able to calm them, and to say to
the winds and the waves, peace! be still!—
This is a solid ground on which you may
rest your hopes before the throne of eternal
mercy “for, if you forgive men their tref-
passes, your heavenly Father will also for-
give you.”

Teach us, O Lord! to understand, and
enable us to fulfil this sublime duty, the or-
nament of the gospel, the perfection of
man!

AMEN!

DISCOURSE X.

THE FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

SECOND DISCOURSE—THE EXCELLENCE AND REASONABLENESS
OF THIS DUTY.

LUKE VI. 37.

Forgive, and you shall be forgiven.

THE law of forgiveness is opposed by some of the strongest passions, and the most dangerous prejudices of the human heart. The vindictive passions are prone to precipitate themselves on revenge, and imagine a barbarous pleasure in gratifying this cruel propensity—prejudice is apt to confound patience with pusillanimity, and to suppose that mildness of temper is calculated only to forfeit a certain reputation with the world. Pride fears to lose, by kindness and condescension, that imaginary consequence which it claims for itself. *My enemies have offended me. It belongs to*

the respect which I owe myself to make them feel the effects of their temerity. But pride is an inflated monster, ever blind to its own true interests. More real honor, and more solid happiness will be found from forgiving than avenging injuries.

Having already considered the requisitions, and the extent of this law, I purpose, in the present discourse, to illustrate its excellence, and reasonableness as a principle of conduct—It implies a disposition generous and noble in itself, and fitted to attract respect from the world—It tends to promote our inward tranquillity and peace—And, finally, it assimilates man to his Creator, whose most glorious and interesting attribute is mercy.—After taking a short review of these several topics, I shall strengthen the general argument to this duty, by pointing out the causes that most commonly create dissensions in society, and shewing their insufficiency to justify the lasting and unchristian resentments which too often grow out of them.

I. In the first place, it implies a disposition generous and noble in itself, and fitted to attract respect from the world.

All blind and violent movements of the passions are unworthy of our nature. The true glory of a rational mind is to submit all its actions to the calm and temperate government of reason. There is a dignity in being able to command our feelings, and our conduct in the most critical situations, which is calculated equally to engage the esteem of others, and to gain the approbation of our own hearts.—Where indeed, do we find the most vindictive dispositions? Is it not commonly in those who are most feeble both in body and in mind? But, in proportion as the soul is raised by noble and sublime sentiments, is conscious of a true courage, and can rest upon itself, the less is it prone to this base and degrading vice.—The pusillanimous are revengeful as well as cruel.

Those who admire, without choice, the manners of the world, have been pleased to say that the mildness and forbearance of christian charity is calculated to invite injuries; and, being, in many instances, contrary to the established maxims of honor, must only lead to disgrace. Let us examine these assertions. I do not advocate a weak

good-nature, void of sensibility and energy of character—but, if prudence, and propriety of manners be united to a benevolence of temper ever ready to do good—and a gentleness always cautious of giving offence, rarely will we see examples of that innate malignity that is disposed to pursue worth of this kind with injustice, or to vilify it by insult. Even vicious men look with respect on goodness supported with dignity. If, here and there, such an atrocious spirit should be found, his injustice will be returned upon his own head by the general indignation of society. Besides, religion, in cases of pressing and immediate aggression, forbids not the sacred rights of self-defence. And, in every case, it permits and requires a good man to place himself under the guardian power of the laws of his country, both for protection, and for reparation. The law is without passions. And the reparation of wrongs, which is due to the weal of society, has nothing in it in common with the revenging of injuries.

With regard to those false and frivolous maxims of honor, invented in barbarous times, and adopted by frivolous and barba-

rous men who rarely have any other claim to merit, more real glory and more public esteem will arise from being superior to them, than from complying with them.—We see them daily going into disuse as society progresses in refinement. That affectation of meekness, indeed, that springs from pusillanimity, is a character that deserves to be despised. And much of the reproach that has been poured upon those, who in the stile of the world, *have not properly resented injuries*, has arisen from their own weak and unequal conduct. Rash enough, perhaps, to give offence, it seems to be a pretended principle that restrains them from answering for it. True piety is unoffending, as well as averse from contentions. And then, if, on other occasions permitted and approved by religion, as in defending the innocent, in protecting the helpless, in fulfilling a hazardous duty, a proper ardor and firmness of mind have been displayed, no reproach can be incurred for acting on christian principles, and being superior to an unreasonable custom. It was an excellent reply made by a brave officer, to one who had challenged him to single combat; “You know I am not afraid

to die—I am afraid only to sin. If you wish to bring our personal courage to the proof, I invite you to shew, in the approaching battle, which of us will lead our troops with the greatest bravery to the charge.” And many weak minds there are who are capable of putting their lives to hazard in a sudden impulse of rage, or urged by the fear of shame, who are not able to encounter great and real dangers with coolness and intrepidity at the call of duty. The principles of a pretended honor are disgraced by their origin ; and they are disgraced by the vain, the ignorant, and impetuous men who act upon them.—Where, indeed, are those doughty combats of honor most frequently found ? Is it not at the end of bacchanalian debauches in which men have given up, not only the true glory, but almost the character of human nature ? Is it not at best in those moments of blind intemperate passion, in which man is no longer rational ? Real honor lies in the command of our passions.

These are not professional declaimings and the narrow rules of a religious spirit at variance with human nature, and the common sentiments of mankind. If the celest-

tial purity of the gospel of peace; if the divine majesty of truth can receive support from earth, they will find it in the opinions and the conduct of the wisest and the bravest men of antiquity. That illustrious patriot who was the glory of the Roman Senate, and whose integrity and virtue were proverbial in Rome* had it for a maxim that "*we ought to pardon the faults of every other man, but never our own.*" A philosopher,† who afterwards laid down his life with dignity, in consequence of a most unjust persecution, has pronounced that "revenge is inhuman, however it be authorised by a pernicious custom. On the other hand, says he, how respectable is a man who is incapable of being penetrated by any weapon, or being hurt by injury or reproach!" When a king of Sparta‡ once said "it is the office of a good prince to confer favors on his friends, and inflict punishments on his enemies"—"how much better would it be, replied Socrates, to do good to your friends, and to make friends of your enemies?" One of the greatest, and certainly the most phi-

* The elder Cato.

† Seneca.

‡ Cleomenes.

lofophic of the Roman emperors* has expreffed thefe juft and noble sentiments—“does any one treat me with contumely or contempt? Be the difgrace his own—my ftudy fhall ever be to do nothing that deferves to be defpifed. Does he cherifh againft me an unjuft hatred? It is his fault. It fhall be always my endeavor to be good, gentle, humane, and beneficent, and to fhew him no other examples but thofe of moderation and patience.” Thus do the maxims, and the conduct of thefe great men, refute the falfe notions fabricated by revenge and pride. Although it is beyond the fphere of ordinary chriftians to emulate philofophers, and heroes in the fame of their writings, or the glory of their achievements, yet is it in the power of the humbleft believer in Chrift to rival, and even to furpafs them in the admirable fpirit of their morals.

As philofophy has recommended, fo the univerfal and unbiaffed voice of hiftory ferves to confirm thefe high and noble principles, and to add force to the precepts of

* Marc Antoninus.

the gospel itself. It every where records the praises of those sublime spirits who, having their enemies in their power, and being able to crush them in a moment, have quenched all their resentments against them, and even loaded them with favors. It covers with infamy, and holds up to the execration of posterity those ferocious and vindictive monsters who would expiate with blood, or pursue with plunder, oppression, and chains, the slightest offences against their pride. These are demons sent forth to vex the peace of the world—those are the gods of the earth, and benefactors of mankind. All ages vie in extolling their glory, and pronounce their names with increasing admiration.

Our own hearts on this subject, warmly confirm the verdict of history. With what exquisite emotions we behold David in the tent of Saul! * When he could, in one moment, have taken ample vengeance on that suspicious tyrant for all the persecutions he endured from him, and, by the same blow have placed himself upon his throne, see him

* I. Samuel xxvi.

generously spare his life, and restrain the ardor of his indignant followers who pressed to avenge their master ! Not less amiable does he appear when, after the death of his cruel enemy, he enquires "if there yet remain any branch of the house of Saul, that he may do him good."* On the other hand, had he stained his hands with the blood even of that faithless prince—had he afterwards remembered his crimes to retaliate them on his posterity, David, now the pride of history and of religion, would have become the object of our detestation.—Thus do the native sentiments of the human heart contradict those cruel maxims of revenge so often in the mouths of men. They attest the elevation and grandeur of those principles of forgiveness and charity inculcated in the gospel.

2. The meek and forgiving spirit of a christian tends, in the next place, to promote his inward tranquility and peace.

The heart ruffled and agitated with turbulent and furious passions cannot be happy.

* II. Samuel ix.

Happiness dwells only with a serene mind, and a benevolent temper. Gloomy projects of revenge disquiet, and fill it with bitterness. Corroded by chagrin, inflamed by rage, or devoured by base and secret plans of treachery it is equally a stranger to peace.—Is the object of your enmity raised above you so, that the shafts of your malice cannot reach him? What vexation gnaws, what impotent fury swells the bosom!—Are your best concerted schemes of vengeance frustrated by some unforeseen accident? Or are they, by the wisdom and prudence of your adversary, turned upon your own head? What confusion and shame!—But you have been successful—you have humbled him by disgrace—you have crushed him by your power—you have made him feel the weight of your resentment—are these gratifications that, in a calm hour, you can review with satisfaction? No—when the passions subside, and reason resumes its empire, the work of vengeance always affords food for painful reflection. The maxim that revenge is sweet is a maxim only of the passions—It is false. If, in the dark moment of accomplishing its guilty purpose a diabolical pleasure gleams

across the mind, the transient flash, leaves the cloud that covers it afterwards only the more black and heavy. Hardly could a man invent for his enemy a punishment more cruel than that with which revenge torments himself. It is a cockatrice that stings the bosom that has given it life. Vexed by anxious suspicions, tossed by impatient desires, the hated image of his enemy is continually before his eyes—it haunts him in the day, and despoils of their rest even the hours allotted to repose.—See the restless movements, the convulsed bosom, the inflamed countenance, the pale and quivering lips, the dark and rancorous visage of revenge, and say if happiness can reside there. Above all, when vengeance thirsts to drink the blood of its enemy, what direful storms, what avenging furies does it excite in the breast, after this horrid appetite is sated! Then the spectres of murder shoot before the terrified fancy—then conscience thunders at the bottom of the soul. Heaven above appears in wrath, and Hell beneath seems to augment her flames, and expand her jaws to receive to a more fearful doom than that of other sin-

ners, the wretch who descends into it all covered with his brother's blood.

If your companion, or your friend falls by the murderous weapon of *honor*, that prostituted name for *pride* and *vengeance*, does a less degree of misery follow this deed? Will not the rank crime of blood still harrow up the recollection? Will not the broken ties of friendship still drop with gore before the melancholy and troubled mind? After humanity has recovered from the frenzy of passion, can it look on the deep affliction of bereaved parents—perhaps, on the anguish of a frantic wife, and the cries and tears of helpless orphans calling for their lost father, and not execrate the impious deed? Will not the profound griefs, and the heavy curse of so many distracted mourners light upon the soul like a pestilential breath, and blast all the remaining years of life?—Ah! revenge, however it may be disguised, or sanctioned by the guilty manners of the world, is the cruel poisoner of human happiness. It is daily filling the earth with crimes, and is the parent of half the miseries that afflict mankind.

On the other hand, the gentle spirit of forgiveness, which is the perfection of charity, preserves a constant serenity in the soul, and saves it from those rude tempests that would necessarily destroy its peace. It imparts to the mind the high consciousness of approaching the summit of virtue by the command which it holds over all the passions. By quenching the first sparks of division and disorder, it becomes one of the most powerful principles of social union and happiness. Where it reigns, a peace and order reigns resembling Heaven, "Behold how good, and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is as the dew of Hermon ; as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion ; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forevermore."* This exalted spirit of charity is connected with the best and happiest affections of the human heart. Nay, ascending far above human nature, it derives its origin from that eternal fountain of love which is the source, and the center of union among all intelligent beings. The

* Psalms 133.

temper of forgiveness towards our enemies exercised from the delightful constraints of divine love, as well as from the consideration of those dear and tender claims which mankind have upon us, by being partakers of the same nature, and heirs of the same frailties with ourselves, yields the heart a perpetual spring of the most pure and tranquil satisfactions. Its pleasures are an infinite overbalance for all the sacrifices which so arduous a duty requires. And it is perhaps, the best culture by which to prepare the soul for that perfect love, and those immortal unions that shall take place in the celestial state.

3. The highest recommendation of this evangelical disposition is, that it assimilates man to that first and perfect Being whose most glorious attribute is mercy. "Love your enemies, saith the blessed Saviour, and do good to them that hate you, that you may be the children of your Father who is in Heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust."* The univer-

* Matthew v. 45.

sal goodness of the Creator is the most sublime example for the imitation of man. Every moment he is offended by human follies and crimes; yet, every moment, he showers on the offenders nothing but blessings. The rain fertilizes their fields—the sun brings the fruits of the earth to maturity for their use. To guilty man every sun that rises upon him in peace, and even every herb that springs for his benefit or pleasure should be a monitor to remind him of that benignity and forbearance which he ought to exercise towards those who have offended him. Does not every moment of a life prolonged to him by divine mercy demonstrate the injustice of hatred and revenge? Shall a frail and miserable worm thirst for vengeance when that Almighty Being to whom alone it belongs forbears to execute it? * “Be ye, therefore, perfect, as your Father who is in Heaven is perfect”†—that is, in the language of another evangelist, “be merciful as he is merciful.”‡

* St. Cyprian.

† Matthew v. 48.

‡ Luke vi. 36.

But the most interesting motive for the cultivation of this temper is to be drawn from the great act of divine mercy in the cross of Christ. "God commendeth his love to us in that while we were yet enemies Christ died for us.* Behold that blessed victim who, having lived with meekness amidst innumerable insults and reproaches, died with a sweetness and patience worthy the image and the organ of the divine love to man! While sinners were pouring upon him their curses, he sheds upon them his blessings. While they were multiplying on his sacred person the most cruel outrages, with infinite benignity he pronounces their forgiveness, and even makes the apology of their crimes—"Father! forgive them, for they know not what they do."† Ah! Christians! what an example to us whose sins were obliterated by that act! It is calculated to touch the deepest springs of the soul. Can we hear his gracious voice and not extinguish every hateful and malignant passion which pride has enkindled in the heart? Can *we* be the subjects of divine forgiveness;

* Rom. v. 8.

† Luke xxiii. 34.

and shall we not be willing also to forgive?
“Let therefore, all bitterness, and wrath,
and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking
be put away from you, with all malice.—
And be ye kind one to another, tender
hearted, forgiving one another, even as
God, for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”†

The reasonableness of this duty will become still more apparent from considering the insufficient grounds of those aversions and resentments that most frequently disturb the harmony of society—they are contradictions to our opinions—offences to our pride—opposition to our pleasures or interests—injustice to our character and reputation.

The most innocent differences of opinion have often given rise to implacable dissensions between various parties; and their minds, soured, irritated and inflamed, break asunder, the gentle and holy bands of humanity and charity. It seems as if the self-love of men took their judgment under its protection with peculiar fondness. Each

* Eph. iv. 32.

one is disposed to make his own reason the standard for others not only in political and religious tenets, but even in the management of the most common affairs, and is offended at those differences that must ever necessarily spring out of the imperfection of human nature. They are imputed to malignity, to corruption of heart, to every unworthy cause that can justify our resentment. Alas ! how unbecoming are conclusions of this kind to wise men who understand the narrow limits of human reason, and the infinite prepossessions of the human heart that give a bias to opinion ! Genuine wisdom searches for truth with candor, and embraces it with firmness in proportion to its evidence ; but, at the same time, has forbearance for the weak, has tolerance for the prejudiced, and knows no other weapons for the defence or propagation of its opinions but those of persuasion and conviction.

Other grounds of resentment are found in those offences to pride and self-esteem that are so often given in the intercourse of society.

Not to mention that the insolence and disdain of the rich, and the envy and jealousy of the poor, which are frequently the causes of mutual hatred and injustice, are equally the fruits of an ignorant pride that has not learned to rest merit on its true foundations, the influence of this unholy and uncharitable principle is daily appearing on the most ordinary and frivolous occasions. The different circles into which accident or choice has arranged society are made the grounds of a thousand little injuries that are suffered to ferment in the breast, and to destroy their mutual candor. The circumstance alone of being connected with different parties, or moving in different spheres is apt to touch the pride of infirm minds. You have not obtained that rank in particular companies, you have not received that attention from certain persons which you thought was your due—you have perceived in them a reserved or haughty air, you have seen a suspicious glance, you have observed a disdainful smile. Hence arise animosities, hatreds, complaints. Society is disturbed with your resentments. Yet, when the cause is examined, perhaps it exists only in your own suspicions. If it has

a foundation, the evil is aggravated by the jealousy of pride. But, be the offence as great as your self-love has painted it, is it a ground on which you should violate towards your neighbour all the precious charities of religion? A wise man, acquainted with the world, should remember how often these appearances are mistaken—a good man, pitying the weakness that would offer him an unmerited insult, should be contented, like the Roman Emperor, to do nothing that deserves to be despised.*

Repeated and pointed oppositions to our interests or pleasures, as they are hard to be borne by the frailty of human nature, are too often esteemed a justification of the revengeful passions. How can I love the man, you say, who, on all occasions, sets himself against me? How can I forgive the malice that is perpetually thwarting my designs, and defeating my best founded hopes? Remember that you see his actions only through the medium of resentments that discolour all their objects. The malice which you impute to him may be nothing

* Page 254.

more than a successful rivalship, and the most lawful use of his own rights. His interference with your pursuits may have been wholly accidental, a thing without any unfriendly design. Yet your self-love represents it as a cruel and intentional injury. Ah! how unjust are your suspicions both to yourself and to him! But, were he an enemy, shall you add to the injury he has already done you, one still greater, by wounding your own peace, and putting in hazard your eternal salvation? How much more worthy of a christian would it be to be superior to evil by the force of divine love, and, in the riches and glory of your celestial inheritance, to be able to forget all the inferior injuries of time.

Finally, another cause of those bitter and uncharitable resentments that so often disturb the peace of the world, is to be found in the tales and whispers that are continually stealing through society, like an infectious air, and poisoning the sources of its happiness.—That person, you suppose, has done injustice to your reputation, or spoken of you with contempt or slight. This may be a misrepresentation as unjust to him as

to you. It may be the work of that ever brooding suspicion only that hatches in the fancy nothing but scorpions to sting and destroy its own peace. It may be merely the tale of inconsiderate and talkative persons who are continually *scattering through society firebrands, arrows, and death, and then say, like the madman, is it not in sport?*—Perhaps it has been insinuated to you by designing men, who delight in the mischiefs they create, or by false friends who study only to recommend themselves by a pretended and officious zeal for you.—If he has spoken against you, may it not have been the effect of inconsideration which innocence does not feel, and to which generosity of temper will be superior? May it not have been occasioned by the influence of pernicious slanderers and tale bearers who have prepossessed and soured his mind? A weakness which, a good man will pity and excuse. May it not have arisen from dark and suspicious circumstances in your own conduct which you have not condescended to explain? Have you not, with too much pride, observed a certain distance and reserve with regard to these circumstances that leaves suspicion to impress upon them

its darkest colours? A great wit once said, "it is necessary for mankind only to converse together freely every day to make them all of one religion." With much greater truth might it be said that a free and candid intercourse would make them all friends.

But, admit that he has slandered, that he has reproached you, and that you have found in him the certain proofs of an unreasonable enmity, how ought a christian to retaliate and refute such unworthy charges? Not by falling into the same faults—not by bitterness, and clamor, and wrath. These are unholy weapons, and are usually the evidences of a weak and vulnerable character in those who use them. A mild and amiable disposition, a prudent and virtuous conduct is the best refutation of every calumny to the world. And, with regard to him, the dignity of meekness and silence will humble him infinitely more than any resentments, which tend only to gratify his pride, and to give him a malicious consequence in his own esteem, by seeing his power to disturb your repose.

Upon the whole view of the subject, how amiable as a rule of conduct, is the christian law of forgiveness and charity ! It contains in it the sublimest philosophy, as well as the principles of the most interesting civility and politeness of manners. Not only does it prohibit contention and hostility, but all those rude and unfriendly passions that disturb the harmony of society—nay, “whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause,” violates its mild and benevolent spirit. If all men would submit their passions and their actions to its gentle controul, it would speedily render the world, now filled with disorder and with crimes, an image of the peace and felicity of Heaven. I am aware there are delicate situations into which a man may be thrown, which will render obedience to this law, the last effort of self-command. But no virtue can be perfected without an effort—no victory can be gained without a conflict. Let it be remembered that the greater the obstacles are which you overcome, the richer will be your crown in the regions of immortal peace. The duty is of the highest importance, and it will, from the impartial judge of all, receive a proportionable reward.—If it is

difficult, it is not impossible. And it becomes a christian continually to implore, at the throne of divine grace, those aids of the Holy Spirit that will enable him to cultivate and bring it to perfection.

In order to avoid contention and wrath, cultivate a meek and benevolent temper.—“As much as in you lieth, live peaceably with all men.” Maintain an inoffensive commerce with the world. Let every kind and delicate attention mark your intercourse with your friends and companions. Be ready, without envy or coldness, to render justice to their good qualities—interpret with candor their doubtful actions—treat with indulgence their capricious humors—cast a mantle of love over their infirmities. Aid not the slander, or ridicule thrown on absent characters; but make it your benevolent rule to defend them. Never lend an ear to calumny; nor listen to the officious and faithless tales brought to you by others against yourself, only to disquiet your peace. Seek not to intermeddle in affairs that are not your own. Especially, beware of prying into the secrets of families in order to disclose them. Never give way to sudden im-

pulses of passion; but check them till you have had leisure to consider and reflect.—Imitate the example of the blessed Jesus “who, when he was he reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered he threatened not.”* Governed by the maxims of prudence and benevolence, rarely will you have important injuries to resent—and still more rarely will it not be in your power to curb your resentments, and subdue your passions, which you have already reduced under habitual controul.

But, if, notwithstanding the clear and explicit law of Christ, and so many motives to the practice of charity and mercy as the gospel exhibits, the poison of a revengeful temper, the gall of bitterness and wrath should still lodge at the bottom of the heart, remember that he who sheweth no mercy shall himself meet with none from a just and righteous God. “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves. Vengeance is mine I will repay, saith the Lord.”†—Haughty and vindictive spirits! who would pluck from the hand of the Almighty the

* Pet. ii. 22.

† Rom. xii. 19.

ballance and the sword, look up to that tribunal where your own judgment awaits you ; and let the awful majesty of divine justice humble your pride, and correct your rage. What right have you to encompass the altars of mercy ? With what plea can you approach the throne of grace ? How can you dare pronounce that prayer dictated by divine love in the form of man—"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us !" Alas ! in it you imprecate upon your heads the most tremendous curse. As you forgive those who trespass against you ! When revenge still rankles in your heart ! When you hate, when you abhor, when you would crush your enemy in the dust ! Just God ! is not this to demand thy thunders ? Is it not to tempt, to solicit from thy hands the flames that are destined to consume hardened and impenitent guilt ? Renounce then at the foot of the cross, on which the Saviour died for his enemies, all malice and anger—"let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Extinguish in your hearts its unhallowed flames. And let no fires burn there but the holy fires of love to God, and love to mankind.

AMEN !

DISCOURSE XI.

ON THE PLEASURES OF RELIGION.

PSALMS XIX. 11.

In keeping of them there is great reward.

WHAT is the chief good? Was the great inquiry of the ancient schools; and the different answers to this question formed the principal distinctions among the various sects of philosophy. Happiness is the end of all the pursuits of men—it is the object of all their sighs. Yet are they almost ever disappointed in the means that are taken to obtain it. They follow the dictates of their passions. And it is not till after they have sought it in vain through every form of false pleasure that they come, at length to find it, where alone reason and religion have concurred to place it in obedience to God, and a life of virtue. Here the anxious mind finds a calm and settled

peace which it had not known, and which it could not know amidst the agitations of the world—and here it finds those sublime, and delightful objects of contemplation, or enjoyment which alone are worthy of a rational and immortal nature. Vicious men who see nothing in God but an angry judge, the enemy of their pleasures, and who see nothing in religion but the restraints which it imposes upon their favorite enjoyments, are apt to represent it to themselves as an austere service, and as drawing a deep shade of melancholy and gloom over the whole of life. But a good man who has all his inclinations regulated by the principles of reason, and the spirit of piety, will find, in the affections and the objects of religion, the sources of his supreme enjoyment. He need not ask, like the discontented world, “who will shew us any good? God is his chief good. “And, in keeping his commandments, there is great reward.”

This reflection of the psalmist might be extended to shew the beneficial influence of religion on all our temporal, as well as our eternal concerns. A rational piety, unmixed with the excesses of enthusiasm, or the

gloom of superstition, contributes to the improvement of all the estimable qualities both of body and of mind. By freeing the soul from the obscuring mists of sensual passions, it tends to enlighten and invigorate those powers, whatever they may be, with which it hath pleased the Creator to endow it. By restraining pernicious vices, and by the moderation of the appetites, it is favourable to health. The goodness and benevolence of heart which real piety inspires, sheds an inimitable grace upon the manners. It gives a purity of sentiment, and dignity of conduct that attracts esteem and confidence from the world, and by the habits of temperance, frugality, industry, and integrity which it promotes, it is friendly to the advancement of every temporal interest.

These subjects would bear an ample and an useful illustration. But I purpose, in this discourse, to confine my view to the internal comforts that flow from religion. It offers the highest satisfactions to the mind—It yields the purest pleasures to the heart—It introduces serenity and peace into the breast—And finally, it affords a source

of happiness that is always within our power, that is secure from the vicissitudes of life, and that shall be eternal.

1. It offers the highest satisfactions to the mind.—The exercise of reason and imagination, which are its principal powers, on objects worthy their nature, are among the chief, as they are certainly among the noblest pleasures of a thinking being. To live without thought, or to employ its energies on low and degrading objects, is to sink our nature, and to rob it of a sublime felicity to which the goodness of the creator had destined it. And what subjects are so great and interesting, and so well deserve to employ the rational faculties of man as those which religion presents to his contemplation? The being and perfection of the Deity, and his glorious works who *in wisdom hath made them all*—the astonishing economy of our redemption through an incarnate and a suffering Saviour, *which things the angels desire to look into*—the nature of man, so skillfully and *wonderfully made*—the perfect law of his duty—and his present and eternal destinations. On these sublime ideas vicious men likewise may em-

ploy their talents. But, not directed by a spirit of piety, their views are false and narrow, their conclusions sceptical and cold. They perceive not that high glow of delight which a good man feels who examines into them only that he may adore God with a more profound sentiment, and offer him a more exalted and reasonable service.

Imagination, also derives its most elevating and delightful exercises from religion. Its proper field, and employment is among the works of nature, contemplating their grandeur, their wisdom, and their beauty, and inflaming devotion by considering the indications which they contain of infinite power, intelligence, and goodness. Piety sees God in all things; and, by its influence on the heart, sheds a divine charm over the universe. The holy psalmist, in many of his compositions, that are as much distinguished by the fine genius of poetry by which they were inspired, as by the spirit of devotion which they breathe, gives us a beautiful example of an imagination kindled, and a heart touched by these pious views of nature. The heavens declare the

glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work.* “O Lord my God! thou art exceeding great! thou art clothed with honor and majesty! who coverest thyself with light as with a garment who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain! who layest the beams of thy chambers in the waters! who makest the clouds thy chariots! who walkest upon the wings of the wind! O Lord! how manifold are thy works! In wisdom thou hast made them all! The earth is full of thy riches!”† “Praise him Sun and Moon. Praise him all ye stars of light! Praise him ye Heavens of Heavens!”‡ The writings of this author are full of such divine extasies. A good man cannot read them without partaking, in some measure, of the delightful enthusiasm by which they were inspired. With the same spirit, likewise, *he* contemplates the works of the Creator, and often derives from them the like holy raptures. Imagination and taste, the sources of so many boasted pleasures to the refined and cultivated mind, afford even to it comparatively barren and frigid enjoy-

* Psalms ix. 1.

† Psalms civ.

‡ Psalms cxlviii.

ments unless they are united with religion, and warmed with its sacred fires.

II. Religion likewise yields the purest pleasures to the heart.

The principal enjoyments of life are derived from warm and regulated affections. We may be said to be happy in proportion as we love what is worthy of the heart.—The reigning affections of piety are *the love of God*, and *the love of man*. No principles of happiness are so pure and excellent in themselves, or so ennobling to human nature. When we turn our view on the divine perfection, can any ideas yield so transcendent a pleasure to a virtuous and pious heart, as that infinite intelligence that shines through all the wonderful structure of nature, and impresses its character on every object that we behold—as that infinite benignity that spreads the light of its beauty on the whole face of the world, and which we continually experience in the felicity of our own lot—in a word, as that infinite cause of all that is sublime, or excellent in the universe, that surrounds us wherever we go, and that intimately penetrates our be-

ing. Meditations on these divine subjects are most worthy of a reasonable and immortal mind; and they are calculated to introduce into it the purest consolations, and, at some precious and chosen moments, the holiest raptures. Pious men, with one voice, confess that their happiest seasons are those in which they are most sensible of the divine presence; or, in which, approaching the throne of God with an humble trust in the divine mercy, they pour out their souls to him in the sweet effusions of gratitude and love. "There be many who say, who will shew us any good? Lord! lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us! Thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time that their corn and their wine abounded."* "Whom have I in heaven but thee! and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee!"† These are not the enjoyments of an unsanctified, or of a cold heart. But, when the heart is *renewed after the image of God*, and formed to the relish of divine truth—when it is *created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works*, and animated by the spirit of piety, it enjoys them with a

* Psalms xlviii.

† Psalms lxxiii.

satisfaction not to be described, and derives from the objects of religion pleasures far superior to those that are yielded by the world, or that are ever tasted by vicious men.

But the divine benignity to mankind shines most conspicuously in a crucified Redeemer. What a subject of delight to a sincere christian who feels his obligations to redeeming mercy! At the foot of the cross he pours the floods of his gratitude, and, looking up to the great sacrifice of his salvation, he indulges the holy triumphs of immortal hope. Blessed Jesus! what consolations flow from thy love! Where can the world open such a sacred and inexhausted fountain of joy? "Whom, having not seen, we love; in whom believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."*

The next branch of religion consists in those kind affections that connect us with mankind. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is one half the law of christian duty, and is the great cement of christian

* I. Peter i. 8.

society. The ordinary intercourse of the world is a cold commerce of interest, or a hypocritical drama of fictitious feelings. And the harmony of society is liable to be frequently disturbed and broken by envy, malice, hatred, emulations, wrath, strife, and such turbulent and malignant passions, which are equally painful to those who indulge them, and those against whom they are directed. True piety, which makes us feel our fraternity with mankind, commands us to extinguish all those selfish dispositions which throw men at a distance from one another. If all men were governed by its benevolent spirit, it would transform this hostile and contentious world into an image of Paradise. By the amiable representation which the apostle gives of this evangelic temper we may estimate its lovely and happy fruits. "Charity suffereth long and is kind—charity envieth not—charity vaunteth not itself—is not puffed up—doth not behave itself unseemly—seeketh not her own—is not easily provoked—thinketh no evil—rejoiceth not in iniquity—but rejoiceth in the truth—beareth all things—believeth all things—hopeth all things—en-

dureth all things."* Many of our most tender and refreshing pleasures arise out of those kind affections that unite us to the great family of-mankind. And heaven, as it respects our intercourse with one another, is but the perfection of these amiable dispositions.—Humanity, that meets in every man a brother—Sympathy, that enters with warmth into the virtuous sensibilities of others—Friendship, that glows with generous emotions, and binds us to those whom we love by the finest ties—Candour, that puts on every dubious appearance the most favorable interpretation—Charity, that feels with quickness the distresses of the unhappy—Integrity, that gives to all their due, and is unwilling to owe any man aught but love—and Generosity, that is more than just, the benevolent overflowing of the soul, are principles of the highest value, not only for their useful and happy effects on society but for the sweet enjoyment which they yield to our own bosom.

The exercise of friendship and benevolence to others is the way to ensure the like

* I. Corinthians xiii.

returns from them. Or, if we meet with unreasonable and malignant spirits, it is the best means to escape, or to render abortive their injurious designs. How many feuds might be avoided, and what quietness of mind might be preserved, by a meekness and forbearance that cannot be provoked to retaliate the aggressions, and offences of unreasonable men? How many wounds to our own peace might be prevented by a gentleness and humility that does not unnecessarily offend the pride, or invite the insolence of others? What painful irritations might be allayed, or would never be suffered to rise in the heart, by a candour that is not easily induced to think evil, or indulge suspicions of our neighbour, and by a generous prudence and dignity of mind that refuses to listen to the calumnies of the world?—If a man would live respected and esteemed, and enjoy the exquisite pleasure of loving, and being beloved, let him early crush in his heart the seeds of all unsocial passions, and cultivate in his commerce with men the divine principles of gentleness and benevolence.

The satisfactions that are derived from this source to a good man, may be estimated by comparing them with the inquietudes that spring from bitter and uncharitable passions. Pride, envy, malice, suspicion, torment the bosom in which they dwell. Jealousies, rivalships, ardent competitions disturb that serenity of mind so essential to happiness. Slanders, discords and mutual injuries poison individual comfort, and tend to rent society to pieces. If violent and malevolent tempers could attain all for which they contend, and most successfully depress a rival, or revenge an injury, their satisfactions would be infinitely overballanced by their pains. Turbid and dark, at best, they resemble the malignant joys of infernal spirits.

As a good man enjoys greater felicity than others from the predominance of humane and gentle dispositions in his own breast, he likewise suffers less than the wrathful and resentful, from the injustice and the slanders which the envy or the malice of the world may aim against him. They, by a rancour that envenoms the heart, by the boiling fury of their rage, or by violent

projects of vengeance, pierce their own bosoms with deeper wounds than their enemies had it in their power to inflict. He, by an equanimity of temper, and dignity of sentiment, the fruit of conscious virtue, preserves a composed and unruffled mind. He dwells above the clouds and storms of the passions that afflict the inferior world, and enjoys a serene sky. Even calumny the cruel disturber of society can hardly discompose his settled tranquility. Secure in his own innocence, he can calmly leave to time and providence his vindication. Nay, enabled, by divine grace, to pity and forgive his enemies, he enjoys, in this heavenly disposition, a sweeter satisfaction than he could derive from the most successful plans of vengeance.

III. Religion is favorable to human happiness by the serenity and peace which it introduces into the breast.

It frees the soul from the misrule of those turbulent and excessive passions that agitate the world with a continual tempest. The heart thrown into tumult by ambition, avarice, lust, or rage, knows no rest. Even the

attainment of its object serves only to inflame it with new desires, or to corrode it with new cares. "The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt—there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."*—Many of the ancient schools of philosophy teaching that these painful solitudes were necessarily attached to the nature of the passions, it was the aim of their wise man to be without passions, in order that he might enjoy within himself, a constant and unruffled calm. His temper became by this means austere and unamiable. If he was not moved by the interests of the world, he was often negligent of its decencies—if he was not discomposed by the injuries of men, he took no share also in their sympathetic pleasures. Religion affects not that phlegmatic, or that sour temper. But, while it gives to the affections that moderate indulgence which nature, by implanting them in the breast, intended they should have, and which is requisite, both to pleasure, and utility, it tempers their ardor, directs their force to lawful objects, and renders them obedient to the authority of reason. Hence

* *Isaiah lvi. 20, 21.*

arises that sweet composure and serenity of mind, so necessary to our happiness, and equally removed from the uneasy storms of passion, and an indolent insipidity of character. Solomon, who had thoroughly tried the intemperate pleasures of vice, and the tranquil enjoyments of piety, gives his decided testimony in favor of the latter.—“The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.”*

But what I have chiefly in view in speaking of the peace that springs from religion, is that which arises from the untroubled and self-approving conscience.

Among the highest satisfactions of the mind, are the consciousness of innocence, and reflection on a well spent life. Vice, indeed, often appears dressed in smiles, and wears the face of happiness—but a worm within secretly corrodes and cankers its peace. “Like the crackling of thorns under a pot so is the laughter of a fool.” The blaze is soon extinguished and all that follows is disappointment and shame. The

* Proverbs iii. 17.

Sinner cannot look into his own breast for that clear and living fountain of joy that continually refreshes the soul of a good man with its pure streams. When he attempts to turn his view inward he discerns nothing but crimes and follies, and misgivings, and fears. Hardly can you render him more unhappy than to remove him from the circle of dissipation and to leave him alone with himself. Harassed by the apprehensions and self-reproach that follow vice, you frequently see him take refuge from them in principles of impiety and immorality.

The peace of a good man arises from a pure conscience, from a sense of forgiven sin, and an humble trust in the mercy of God. The forgiveness of sin relieves the heart from an immense load. The inquietudes of guilt are sweetly composed by the hope of divine mercy exercised through a Redeemer. "In his favour is life, and his loving kindness is better than life." A calm and self-approving mind affords us pleasures of the highest price, not only from the inward serenity that reigns in the bosom; but because it sheds its own satisfactions on all

things else. The universe takes its colouring, if I may speak so, from within ourselves. And the lawful comforts of the world are tasted with infinitely a higher relish when they are enjoyed with a good conscience. "The fruit of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever."* The best of men, indeed, are liable to frailties and errors that may sometimes disturb the peace of their minds. But repentance soon restores their serenity. And when its transient and precious showers have been shed upon the soul, the *sun of righteousness* again breaks forth, with greater splendor and beauty, from the cloud that, for a moment had obscured his face. Repentance itself is not without its satisfactions to a good man. There is a pleasure even in the tears by which the heart is disburdened of an ingenuous sorrow.

The peace derived from religion displays its value in those moments chiefly when we most require support and consolation, in affliction, and at death. "To the upright there ariseth light in darkness."† "Yea,

* Isaiah xxxii. 17.

† Psalms cxii. 4.

though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, yet will I fear no ill; for thou art with me—thy rod, and thy staff, they comfort me.”* But the guilt of the sinner seems to lie in wait for him at these distressing seasons.† It seizes upon him with redoubled fury when he is already trembling before *the king of terrors*; and, when he is least able to endure it, torments him with the greatest cruelty. Guilt spreads a deep and troubled cloud over the mind that covers it with a dismal shade, and the spectres of fear and terror stalk through the gloom, and affright the departing spirit. Oh! the unspeakable importance of a conscience at peace with itself and with God in the interesting article of dying! What would not the perishing sinner give to obtain it? For what would the triumphant believer be willing to exchange it? All the pleasures of vice, were they at the command of the one, or of the other, would be counted as nothing in the scale.

IV. Religion affords a source of happiness that is always within our power--that is secure

* Psalms xxiii.

† Tillotson.

from the vicissitudes of life—and that shall be eternal.—Seldom are the sources of vicious pleasures completely within our power. Men see them at a distance, and almost the whole of life is employed in pursuing them. But how often do they elude pursuit, or disappoint possession! Difficult to be obtained, they are constantly liable to be wrested from us by a violence the more painful in proportion as we have loved them, or expected felicity from them. The passions either never reach their object, or are never satisfied with what they have gained. In the cares of accumulating fortune, who has attained the summit of his wishes? In the career of popularity, or ambition, how many must necessarily be thrown out in the course? And thorny and uneasy is the crown which the victors gain. And, amidst the pleasures of unlawful love, what treachery is found! what inconstancy! what rivalships! what jealousies! what base deceptions! what dishonorable disguises! and, at length, what conscious shame! Is it not extreme folly for a reasonable mind to place its happiness in objects over which it has no controul, and of which the greater part are beyond its reach?

A good man carries within himself, in the purity of his thoughts, in the sanctity of his affections, in the discharge of his duty, and in the sense of the divine favor, the sources of his best enjoyments, or he every where finds them in the works of God that are always open to his view, and his devout meditation. From all the uncertain pursuits, and perplexing cares of the world, he can turn inward and find in his own breast, an unwasting spring of consolation. And wherever he directs his view he cannot fail to meet in every part of nature, conspicuous indications of the infinite power, wisdom and benignity of God. The universe is an immense temple in which he finds subjects continually to awaken devotion, and to nourish the sublime pleasures of religion. His own experience unceasingly brings home to his heart the proofs along with the fruits of the divine goodness. And the sacred scriptures furnish to him an inexhausted treasure of the most delightful affections, and the most blessed hopes. The sources of his supreme happiness, therefore, are not, like those of vice, uncertain, or placed beyond his controul: They are always within his reach, they are ever present, and he can-

not, by any untoward accident, be deprived of them.

The comforts that flow from religion are also secure from the vicissitudes of life.—The men who have connected their happiness too closely with the present world, are liable to all its instability and its changes. They are exposed continually to have their dearest comforts taken from them, or blasted to their enjoyment. Their possessions may melt away in their hands, or, by some sudden and unforeseen calamity, may be wrested from them. The friends who were dearer to them than their own souls may be torn from their embrace. It may please God to lay on them heavy affliction, and to embitter to them all the satisfactions of the world; or to bury the world along with them in the grave. The grave is to them a land of darkness and horror. And when the world is gone, gone with it is all their happiness.

On the other hand, the divine power forms a mighty and impenetrable shield over a good man beneath which he walks secure amidst all the evils and perils that

encompass his mortal state. He is subject to external changes in his lot as others are ; but his happiness is independent on them. It lies far above this varying, unstable scene, and beyond the influence of its vicissitudes. Storms and tempests may agitate and afflict the lower world ; but he has gained an elevated situation above them where the sun always shines. His happiness partakes of the serenity of Heaven, and the unchangeableness of God. If afflictions assail him they tend only to purify his heart, and to connect him more closely with his chief-good. If the grave receives him, God is still his portion. It is not a gulph that buries his pleasures, or his hopes—it is the gate, already blessed by his Saviour's passage through it, that admits him to the full fruition of them. Nay, when not this frail tenement of clay alone shall moulder into dust, but when the universe shall be dissolved and fall in ruins ; in the last tremendous convulsions of nature, the good man is safe. The almighty power of God will preserve him, and plant him in those *new heavens* and that *new earth* that shall arise out of the chaos.—Blessed portion! his

felicity shall be secure from all vicissitude—and, it shall be eternal.

The richest treasure of religion is the assured expectation of a blessed immortality. The most comfortable hope of the sinner would be to cease to exist at death, and to be forever blotted out of the works of God whose justice he has made his enemy. Even this dismal consolation is denied him, and he is forced to tremble with fearful apprehensions of his approaching doom. But when vice has not made it our interest to seek a refuge from greater miseries in annihilation, it is a bottomless gulph into which the mind looks with horror. Life derives a new and augmented relish from the expectation of future happiness. And the prospects of piety beyond the grave are filled with unutterable consolations. "In the presence of God is fullness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures forever more."* In the bosom of the earth shall be deposited all the imperfections of human nature.—The body shall arise again from the dust, at the last day, adorned with immortal beauty,

* Psalms xvi.

and the soul shall be furnished with celestial powers. Her habitation shall be near the throne of God, in the mansions of angels, and of the spirits of just men made perfect. Her felicity shall be everlasting like the nature of God from whom it flows. As it shall know no period, it shall also know no change, but the changes of perpetual improvement. The soul, contemplating these boundless and glorious prospects, is often lost in holy transport. The pains and griefs of life, which are only hastening to us the blessed moment of possession, lose, in a great measure, their power to afflict us. And the terrors of the grave itself are forgotten in the *desire of the believer to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.* "Amen! even so, come Lord Jesus!"

How blessed, then, is the portion of those who love God, and are found in the way of his commandments! "The statutes of the Lord are right rejoicing the heart. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb. And in keeping of them there is great reward."*

* Psalms xix. 8—10, 11.

The truth, to the illustration of which we have attended, forms one of the strongest recommendations of sincere piety to every wise and reasonable person. The great pursuit of man is happiness. And in religion alone is it to be found, which hath "the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."* Experience must have convinced the most of you, my brethren, that the pursuits of the world, and the passions that connect us only with the vain and fluctuating things of time, have not rendered you happy. They fed you with delusive hopes, while they have embittered life with real pains. The phantoms of joy glided before you. And, in the moment that you thought you were about to embrace them, you grasped an empty shadow, or pierced your bosom with a lasting sting. If pleasures disappointed, passions corroded the heart. Your interests and inclinations have been continually thwarted and wounded by the rival interests and inclinations of others. But religion points out to you a peaceful and delightful path in which no interest can interfere with

* I. Timothy iv. 8.

yours; for the interests of all are the same—no corroding passion can wound the tranquility of your bosom—no flattering joy can disappoint you: but every thing in time and in eternity, on earth and in heaven shall concur to promote your felicity. Beyond the grave, where the hopes, and the works of sinners shall be forever consumed, the pleasures of piety shall only begin to ripen, and attain their compleat perfection. The primitive beauties, and the innocent delights of Paradise shall be restored with boundless increase in that celestial Eden into which Christ shall transplant man redeemed when he shall create the universe anew.

On the whole review of religion, whether we regard the future, or the present, we shall find that, *in keeping the commandments of God there is great reward*—Christians! cultivate its happy temper in your own souls. Invite mankind to its service by the image of its happiness in you. Shew them the fair example of a mind at peace with itself, and with God; occupied with pure and spiritual delights as much above the power of the world to take away as to

bestow; and waiting, with tranquil and cheerful resignation, the blessed moment that shall dissolve its ties with earth, and translate it to a glorious and immortal state of felicity in the Heavens.

AMEN !

DISCOURSE XII.

ON SECRET FAULTS.

PSALM CXIX. 12.

Cleanse thou me from secret faults!

HUMAN Nature is covered with imperfection. Conscience daily denounces to us errors and follies in our conduct, the guilt of which is so strongly marked, that we cannot forbear to acknowledge and condemn them. But, a much greater number, in the hasty and superficial glance which, in the midst of business, or of pleasure, we throw on life, escape our observation—many, when we come to look back upon our own history, and examine our conduct, have passed from our remembrance—and many more are covered from the censure of our own minds by that partiality to whatever is attached to ourselves even by a remote relation, that is among the most dangerous weaknesses of human nature.—

Sins of this kind, forgotten, unobserved, or justified and covered by self-love, are, by the sacred writer in the text, denominated *secret faults*.

As it is of high importance to lay open, as far as possible, every source of humility that should affect a good man at the throne of grace, and to expose to all men the hidden and unsuspected errors of their lives, I shall endeavor, in the present discourse, to disclose their principal causes and springs. From each of these we may derive many facts and truths that may be profitably applied for the examination of our hearts, and the regulation of our conduct. They may be comprised under the heads of ignorance—of self-love—of a corrupted state of public manners—of vicious habits—and of false principles.

I. In the first place ignorance is a fruitful source of faults that, from their very cause must be unknown to ourselves. In an uninformed mind, the passions, uncontrouled by principle, will be continually gathering strength—and every criminal impulse hastens to its object, freed from those

holy and powerful restraints which can be imposed upon it only by an enlightened conscience. Ignorance, as I here speak of it, respects the laws of duty, and the system of divine truth contained in the holy scriptures. For whatever science a man may possess, if his knowledge of these is defective, his heart is, in the same proportion, laid open to the influence of temptation, and subjected to the dominion of its passions. Sound principles of divine truth early received, and permanently fixed in the mind, furnish the most effectual motives to duty, and form the strongest fences of virtue.—Ignorance enfeebles and prostrates both the one and the other. It infallibly leads to vice. Make for it the most favorable supposition that it is the subject of religious impression—it is liable to the false fervors, and the crimes of fanaticism which it exalts into virtues, or it sinks into a vain discharge of the absurd and useless rites and penances of superstition, which it makes the substitutes of duty, and the expiation of its sins. If it is without religious impression, it is prone to plunge into the gulph of profligacy, and to abandon itself to the unrestrained indul-

gence of every vice, to which propensity, example, or habit invites. Is not a great part of the reproachful idleness, the gross profanity, the shameless intemperance and obscenity that so often disgrace the inferior orders of society, and offend our eyes, and wound our ears even in the public streets, to be ascribed to that defect of principle and instruction that leaves the mind without a clear light to guide its conduct, or a faithful monitor to restrain its excesses? Those who are least informed, indeed, cannot be wholly ignorant of the evil of these vices, but, unacquainted with the holiness and extent of the divine law, the high degree of their criminality is, in a great measure, unknown to them. They are covered with the guilt of *secret faults*, and are sinking into perdition, unconscious of the load that is pressing them down. Will ignorance, according to the false hopes of sinners, exculpate the conscience? Invincible ignorance might; but ignorance of duty in the midst of our lights, arising, as it does, from a criminal abuse of reason, or a criminal neglect of the means of information, can only aggravate the guilt of our offences. But sins of ignorance, and this is a truth

that, in a particular manner, claims the attention of every serious mind, are not chargeable on the profligate and uninstructed alone, but, from the imperfection of human nature, adhere, in a degree, to the best of men, and furnish a subject of humility to the most eminent saints—sins that spring from infirmity or neglect by which a thousand fugitive thoughts escape attention, a thousand habitual ideas and emotions rise in the heart and pass away again without ever being examined, or compared with the great standard of duty in the word of God. Sins that arise from partial and limited views of the extent and sanctity of the divine law, and finally, sins that arise from mingling with the law of God the errors of our own reason, or the prejudices of a mistaken education. “Who can understand his errors?” The veil that covers the heart is sometimes lifted up, and we discern in ourselves evils that we had not suspected. But when we have seen all that human weakness ever sees, innumerable *vain thoughts* will still lodge within us undiscovered, and form a subject of daily humility and repentance at the throne of grace.

II. Another source of secret faults is found in the dangerous influence of self-love.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?” Its deceitfulness has been a subject of complaint to good men in all ages. Hardly is there a foible, or a vice of character which it is not able to palliate, or to conceal. Daily we see it exemplified in the discourses and conduct of others, and they, doubtless, perceive it in us. But, in innumerable instances, its effects are so subtle that neither they nor we discern them.—Every propensity of nature, in proportion to its strength, furnishes us with proofs of this influence; but, of all the principles of self-deceit pleasure is the most powerful, and opens the widest field for those impositions which men are daily passing upon themselves. They are easily deceived where they already wish to be deceived. Whatever yields them pleasure they are studious to justify. All the falacies of reason are mustered up to defend the favorite indulgence, and to overcome those scruples that fill the mind, and oppose themselves to the first approaches of vice. And no conclu-

sions ought we to suspect more than those which after much thought and attention, we finally drew on the side of our inclinations. The greater pains we have taken, the more various the lights to which we have turned the favorite idea, and the more subtlety and refinement we have used in framing our ultimate judgment on the case, the farther, perhaps, we have erred from the truth. These anxious researches, these ingenious reasonings, instead of being a fair and candid enquiry after truth, may be nothing more than the efforts which self-love is making to justify indulgence. There is scarcely any degree of guilt which this principle will not cover or excuse. "All the ways of a man are right in his own eyes." Hence the science of self-knowledge is rendered above all others difficult and obscure: and however deeply we may penetrate the *mystery of iniquity* in our hearts, an unfathomable abyss will still remain in the errors and the blindness of a dishonest self-love, which we can never sufficiently explore.

III. General example, likewise, frequently contributes to render our faults secret,

and unknown to ourselves, by taking off from the mind that impression of guilt, or abating that sentiment of abhorrence which vice is apt to produce when it is more rarely seen.

In consequence of that mysterious sympathy by which men are drawn together, and formed on each others character and model, they slide insensibly into manners that are continually presented to view in the public example. Custom they confound in their ideas with propriety. And, in a thousand instances, we daily see folly lose its impertinence, and frivolity, deformity, and even vice cease to disgust when recommended and justified by fashion. The best of men frequently perceive their zeal for the glory of God, and the highest interests of human nature, languish through the lukewarmness and formality that have invaded the great body of their fellow-christians. They contract some taint in their own manners from the general licence in the midst of which they live. "Because iniquity abounds the love of many waxes cold." If they have been accustomed to see the sabbath violated, do they not with less scruple, themselves in-

fringe upon its holy rest? If they are surrounded by scenes of levity and dissipation, frequented by those with whom, on other grounds, they are in the habits of intimacy, are they not liable to suffer from the contagion of that contaminated society? If they habitually hear the sacred name of the Majesty of Heaven insulted and profaned, is not the horror of the customary impiety lessened in their esteem? Is not the spirit of the world, by the force of numbers and example, making daily inroads upon the pure and heavenly spirit of piety? The conscience is rendered less scrupulous and tender by the frequency of seeing vice. Indulgences that will not bear the rigorous test of reason and the word of God come at last to be regarded merely as innocent compliance with the manners of the world. Numbers and fashion become a kind of pledge for the innocence of every practice upon which they impress their stamp. Mankind are prone to judge of the truth of opinions, and the propriety of conduct more from custom than from reason—more from the example of others than from the results of their own serious investigation, and the intimate conviction of their own breasts.—

From this error good men are not wholly exempted; and example becomes even to them, and much more to others, a fruitful source of *secret faults*. “ Evil communication corrupts good manners,” and, at the same time, hides the corruption from the eye of conscience. The greater part of the world follow just as they are led—active minds prevail over the indolent, and the daring over the weak—and the multitude of sinners resign their conscience and their conduct to the direction of men more criminal than themselves. Ah! it is not by the customs of men but by the law of God that we should judge our hearts. How many sins, that are now hidden from our view by the predominant influence of custom and example, will be disclosed to us by affliction that strips the false and seductive colouring from the world—by the approach of death that draws forth from beneath every covering and disguise the inmost principles of the heart—by the penetrating light of eternity that, shed upon the soul in the article of dying, searches and reveals its deepest, and its darkest recesses. Oh! how vain are the opinions and example of men, which are made the encouragement and justification

of so many faults, when weighed against the law and the judgment of God. A good man, sensible of his frailty and his danger, will daily confess and deplore the evils that may be concealed from his view by this unhappy influence, and will studiously disentangle truth from the vain fashions of opinion, and of manners with which it is combined, and by which it is distorted. But, sinners, resting upon the multitude of their fellow sinners, are contented to wrap themselves up in a fatal security till God comes at length to rent the veil that covers their crimes, and to shed upon them the dreadful and consuming light of his justice.

IV. Another cause of secret faults may be found in the effects of habit.

Propensities or actions that have become habitual we are apt to confound with the original tendencies of nature, and, equally, to ascribe them to the author of our being. They operate almost without our thinking of them; and men seldom take the pains to examine their rectitude, or their relations to the divine law. If any faults, therefore, have gradually grown up with them, and

become incorporated into their manners, they are rarely, and with difficulty cured—they are hardly seen as faults.

Habits advance by such insensible degrees that it is difficult to remark their progress. They steal us imperceptibly away from the fountain of truth, and the standard of perfection. And when once we begin to yield to the tendencies of corrupted nature, or to the stream of fashionable vice, even good men may sometimes be borne far down the silent and contaminated current before they are aware, till some palpable miscarriage awaken their sleeping conscience, and oblige them to remount to the source of the evil in order to purify it. David could not have passed at once from those sublime and pious fervors that glow in his sacred compositions, and still animate the devotions of the church, to that act of gross sensuality and injustice that was the stain of his life, and embittered to him the remainder of his days: gradually he must have yielded to the temptations of his fortune—the habits of pleasure must have insensibly stolen upon him, till, in an unsuspecting moment, they plunged him into the gulph, and, by his mi-

series, recalled him to himself, and restored the obliterated sentiments of duty on his heart.

Habit has likewise a passive influence upon the soul that greatly contributes to this dangerous effect. Of this influence every day furnishes us with innumerable proofs. Customary appearances attract little attention, and customary actions are performed almost without thought. Hence vices, which are common in society, and which enter into the character and manners of a people, come, at length, to be viewed with a kind of indifference even by a good man, which may expose him, at some times, to be betrayed into criminal compliances with them. Hence faults that have entered into our own habits are slightly remarked, if they are remarked at all, and they speedily pass into an oblivion from which they are never recalled. These forgotten sins, however, leave upon the conscience an indelible taint; and, not improbably, prove the cause of many of those strokes and chastisements in the course of divine providence of which we do not discern the immediate cause, nor the end.

V. Another and much more pernicious source of faults of this kind is to be found in false principles.

The innocence of error, says a great writer,* is the master prejudice of the present age. And a false and dangerous maxim has, perhaps, been too generally received, that it is of small moment what *principles* in morals and religion men may embrace, it is *conduct* alone which we are to regard; as if conduct could be safely, or was in reality ever separated from principles. It is a truth established upon the soundest reason, and demonstrated by constant experience, that practice and principles have a close and intimate relation, and a powerful influence upon one another. Whole nations have had their character and manners formed by the spirit of their legislation, and the maxims of their education. And certain doctrines are daily, among the wise and learned, vindicated or refuted by the consequences that are supposed to result from them. Do we not see that loose manners and licentious opinions tend to beget one

* Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester.

another? The corruption of manners among the Greeks and Romans, in the decline of their republics, gave universal extension to the dissolute doctrines of the epicurean philosophy—and it is acknowledged by their own writers that the prevalence of that philosophy hastened and augmented the degeneracy of the public morals.* The same voluptuous principles, with little variation, have been revived in modern times, and the same pernicious effects have resulted from them. Judge ye what manners will be produced by that system which represents man as being merely an organized system of matter made to perish and be reproduced under other forms like successive crops of vegetables, the sole end of whose being, and the only reasonable object of whose pursuit is sensual pleasure.† Every restraint is, by such doctrines, removed from the passions, every encouragement is given to vice. To what purpose are the self-denials of virtue if we perish forever at death, and if we shall meet, beyond the grave, with no reward worthy of its sacrifices? If

* See particularly Polybius book vi. for an account of its effect among the Greeks.

† Helvetius.

appetite alone furnishes the chief good of man, how should honor, friendship, justice, or religion, stand in the way of its gratification? Such false and pernicious principles tend, not only to promote vice; they cover and protect it likewise from the censure of our own conscience. Would you see in its extent the criminal conduct that may spring from a brutal philosophy that thus sensualizes the soul?—Examine the history of those men who have been its most zealous and distinguished advocates. Gross and shameful often is their public conduct; but their secret history presents scenes of vice, from which piety and virtue must turn away with horror. Nothing can exceed the licentiousness, the hypocrisy, the baseness, the treachery, the cruelty, the total dereliction of humanity and virtue, of which many of the adepts of an impious philosophy have shewn themselves to be capable.* Yet, in their principles do they find the justification of their crimes, and they seem to possess the fatal art of persuading them-

* See the history of the illuminatti in Germany and France, by John. Robison, professor of Nat. Phil. in the university of Edinburg; a work that deserves to be read by every friend to virtue and religion, who is solicitous to penetrate into the causes of the present prevalence of vice and infidelity.

selves of their own innocence. As one example, let me call to your recollection a work but too well known, and yet, among the least criminal of those efforts that have lately been made to corrupt all moral principles—I mean *the confessions of Rousseau*. They exhibit to us innumerable follies, the eternal caprices of a restless, fickle, and ungovernable temper, the culpable fruits of passions always excessive, many very low, and many very shameful vices. Yet, we see him, in the introduction of that extraordinary recital, presume, with an audacity that shocks the pious mind, to present the history of his infamy at the throne of the eternal, and to justify his crimes to his creator and his judge who had given him his passions. “Let the last trumpet, saith he, sound when it will, I will advance with this book in my hand, to present myself before the supreme judge—I will boldly say, behold what I have done! Here is what I thought! this is what I have been!”—This man’s principles must have formed to him, the justification of so many crimes—They must, at least, have concealed from him their turpitude and guilt, or he could not have dar-

ed, with such shameless honesty, to blazon his disgrace before the face of the world.

Men, who are not seeking apologies for their vices, may, under a mistaken sense of duty, be guilty of high offences against piety and against humanity. "The time shall come, said the Saviour to his disciples, when he that killeth you shall think that he doth God service." And the apostle Paul, speaking of himself before he had embraced the faith of the gospel, says, "I verily thought with myself that I *ought* to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Much more are they liable to errors in their conduct of inferior moment from the false principles which the frailty of reason and the prejudices of education frequently mingle with the religious systems of the best of men.—They maintain, perhaps, the basis of divine truth; but they erect upon it a superstructure, in many instances, incorporated with errors of greater or less magnitude. In whatever degree such errors exist, in the same proportion is the spirit of their piety impaired, and the system of their virtues rendered imperfect. According to the figure of the apostle, *if they build on the solid foundation*

of the gospel, wood, hay, stubble, that is, any erroneous principles that lead to an unholly practice, their works shall be burnt, but themselves shall be saved yet so as by fire—the fire shall consume all the false additions that have been made to this rock of ages which supports the faith and hope of every real believer. Yet, till the day when the fire shall try them, the mistaken professors of the gospel may not only remain blind to the imperfections of their own character, but even flatter themselves with the idea of their innocence or their merit.—Ah! who can understand his errors! Cleanse thou me from secret faults?

As the class of evils of which I have been treating is capable of being so much increased by ignorance of our duty, and of the innumerable and delicate relations which we sustain to our Creator, and to one another, permit me, in the remarks which I design to make, in the conclusion of this discourse, to call your attention, in the first place, to the importance of early instruction upon these necessary subjects.—Men, in the beginning of life, and before their habits are formed, more frequently fail in their

duty from want of information, than from any natural malignity of heart. It is only a mind that has already made considerable progress in vice that can deliberately violate its own clear and certain sentiments of right and wrong. An enlightened conscience imposes the most effectual restraints upon the passions, which are the principles of evil in man. It unfolds the law on each case of conduct as it arises, and adds to the prescriptions of duty, the most powerful motives of obedience. Hence it is that *faith*, not, as the enemies of religion assert, a blind belief of uncertain facts, and unintelligible mysteries, but a clear understanding, and firm persuasion of the truths of the gospel, is laid, by the apostles, at the foundation of a good life, and thereby made the condition of our salvation. The most intimate relations subsist between duty and truth—And the principal value of truth is that it leads to duty.

This course of education should commence from our earliest years. The human character is forming from the first moment the senses begin to act. And it is of high consequence that nothing but the most just

ideas, and the purest principles of truth should be instilled into the minds of children, and the most amiable examples of virtue exhibited before them. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." "The word of God will be a light to his feet and a lamp to his path." "It is like a fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces"—it will dissolve it and mould it into any shape.

The defect of early instruction in the principles of piety and virtue is productive of great and innumerable evils. The prophet Hosea attributes to it the corruption of manners in the nation of Israel; and, after an affecting enumeration of their crimes,* he adds, "my people are destroyed for lack of knowlege."—Both age and youth which would make progress in the honourable course of virtue, and finally attain to *perfect holiness in the fear of God*, should diligently *search the scriptures*, and study, by all means, to enlarge their acquaintance with these pure and infallible oracles of truth. Let

* Hosea iv. 1—6.

them be your *meditation all the day*; and, from their precious stores of knowledge and instruction draw all the rules of your conduct.

2. The tendency of self-love to deceive us in the estimate which we make of our own character, and to cover many errors in our conduct, renders it necessary that we should often enter profoundly into the principles of the heart, and the motives of our actions, and that we should be able to discriminate the characters of genuine piety from all the false pretences, and plausible appearances of virtue with which we are prone to confound them. By a candid and faithful examination of ourselves we may be able to discover and correct many secret faults that would otherwise defile the conscience. For this purpose, often retire apart from the world where self-love is strengthened by every object that awakens the passions, and where cares and pleasures continually call us out of ourselves. Frequently seek that holy solitude, in order to converse with your hearts, where none shall be present besides God and yourselves.—Strengthen there your own honesty in this

important duty by the consciousness of his pure and inspecting eye, and by the recollection of the account which we must render at his bar. Judge yourselves with the same spirit with which you shall be judged. It is a duty prescribed by reason, as well as enjoined by the word of God. *Know thyself* was the most famous maxim of ancient wisdom—and, in such estimation was it held by the most enlightened people in the universe that they inscribed it over the entrance to the most sacred of their temples.* The holy scriptures press and repeat it again and again—"Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith—prove your own selves—know ye not your own selves how that Jesus Christ is in you except ye be reprobates?" It is a duty absolutely requisite in order to understand our *secret faults*, and to remove that mask from the heart by which the power of self-deceit is able to conceal from men their true character. Search and try your ways—and, in fulfilling this great duty, remember that you shall shortly be tried at a higher bar by the righteous judge of quick and dead. And do thou O Lord

* The temple at Delphi.

mercifully reveal to us the faults that will still be covered from our own view! *Search us, and know our hearts, try us, and know our thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting.*

3. The reflections to which you have attended admonish you likewise to be on your guard against the dangerous influence of fashion and example. Fashion draws after it manners and opinions by a silent and powerful charm. And each age has its peculiar modes of thinking and acting. Whatever, therefore, is recommended by general example we ought to examine with peculiar scrupulosity, not only because we are prone to slide into the imitation of it with an incautious facility, but because general manners, in the present age, have departed far from the purity and simplicity of the gospel. The stream of fashion seems, indeed, to a certain distance, to co-incide with that of piety and virtue; but then insensibly separating from it, it bears away those who, without caution, commit themselves to its current. Scrutinize all your actions, not by what others do, or permit, but by the word of God, which is the infal-

lible test of rectitude and truth.—Ah ! how often, in this period of general licence, and relaxation of morals, hath a secret infection reached your hearts from that contaminated influence in the midst of which you live? How often hath the spirit of the world, carried into your most holy devotions, left the heart still barren and cold at the throne of grace? How often have criminal, or, doubtful compliances with its manners left a secret taint upon the conscience, and invited others to receive with indifference or contempt a religion that departed so little from their own habits?—Learn then to fear the infectious commerce of the world—Retire from the midst of that example, and of those societies which you find by experience to impair the holiness and integrity of your walk with God.—Do you ask where is the forbidden limit? for, to a certain degree, we may innocently conform to the world. It is difficult to ascertain it by any universal rule—One criterion however is sufficiently sure, the moment that you perceive the fervor of your affections towards your Creator, your Saviour, and the objects of your duty beginning to abate, the moment that you find yourself obliged to excuse, or be-

ginning to make apologies to your own hearts for certain liberties, that moment you have already gone too far.

If the contagion of fashion, and sympathy with the public manners, are able sometimes to lead established christians into sin, much more are youth, thoughtless, gay, easily attracted by every object of pleasure, and susceptible of dangerous impressions from every companion with whom they meet, liable to corruption from the ill examples that are every where presented to their view. Seduced by a contagious sympathy with such associates, enflamed with dissolute pleasure they are hurried on in a thoughtless career; or, if they ever think, it is only to invent apologies for their vices, and to find means to hide their real character from themselves. They envelope themselves in the mists of their passions, and think they are concealed also from the eye of God. Ah! the thunders of divine justice are collecting above that dark cloud that intercepts your sight, and, in the moment of your greatest security they may burst forth—*when you are saying peace and safety! sudden destruction shall come upon you.* In the judgment of God,

your *secret faults* shall appear to be manifest crimes, and all the deceitfulness of sin shall be stript off before his holy and impartial tribunal.

With one more admonition I conclude this discourse. Beware of false principles in religion. I speak not now of those atrocious doctrines in philosophy that prostrate all religion, and cover the most enormous vices under an appearance of reason. I speak only of principles adopted by the friends of piety that spring out of the errors of their own understanding, but, mingled with the purity and simplicity of the gospel, tend to corrupt it. From the prejudices of education, and from a vain confidence in the powers of reason they are prone to confound certain notions and abstractions of their own minds with the plain and simple doctrines of revelation, and out of the whole to compose one heterogeneous mass. Their own speculations, they too often make the basis of their system; and instead of conforming their reasonings with the divine word, they bend this sacred standard into a compliance with their preconceived ideas. This spirit

has introduced various corruptions into the christian church, and, by the ascendancy which it has given to the vain and arrogant pretensions of reason beyond its proper sphere, has hastened the extension of an impious philosophy. For, the moment that reason forsakes the guidance of revelation, and those obvious and universal sentiments and feelings of human nature upon which the evidence of revelation is founded, there is no point of rest till it has destroyed all truth, and arrived at a frightful atheism.— Every departure from the divine simplicity of the gospel, every mixture of false science with its pure and heavenly light, tends to obscure its lustre, and to impair its sanctifying effect upon the heart. Blind and erring as we are, and subject to innumerable prejudices, arising chiefly from the influence of the passions, every addition which we make to the simple word of God will, too probably, become the nurse of some vice, or foible of character, and mar the beauty and consistency of our christian profession—it covers, under the mask of a profession, many *secret faults*. And according as the various sects of religion approach, or decline from this standard we see them distin-

guished from one another by the different degrees of their sanctity, by the spirit of their morals, and even by their manners.

Friendly, from the whole view which we have taken of this subject, let me recall to your most serious consideration the profound humility that becomes us before the throne of grace on account of our manifold and secret imperfections. The language of the holy Psalmist, will be that of every sincere and penitent believer—"Innumerable evils have compassed me about—mine iniquities have taken hold upon me so that I am not able to look up—they are more than the hairs of my head, therefore my heart faileth me."—How many sins have escaped our knowledge or observation, even in the moment of committing them? How many, on a review of life, have escaped our recollection? How many have been overlooked through the imposing influence of custom and general example? How many have been covered by the deceitfulness of self-love? How many have passed for innocent conformities with the laws of nature, or have even been mistaken for virtues through the effect

of false principles? Ah! Who can understand his errors? We are altogether as an unclean thing! Our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away! Cleanse us O Lord, from secret faults! Keep back thy servants also from presumptuous sins!

AMEN!

DISCOURSE XIII.

ON PUBLIC VICES.

 PSALM XIX. 13.

Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins.

PRESUMPTUOUS SINS form a comprehensive class of evils, and embrace all known and deliberate acts of vice. They require no other description, and are evidently placed by the sacred writer, in contrast with *secret faults* which escape the knowledge and observation of our own minds. They are stiled *presumptuous* on account of that hardness, and insolence of heart which they manifest; for, not only have they thrown off the reverence which we owe to that judge which God hath seated in our own breasts; but they insult the authority of his holy law, and set at defiance the terrors of his justice with which he hath armed it.

Of this class of sins, for the conviction, and, if possible, the reformation of the guilty, it is my design to treat. And, that I may render the illustration the more clear, and useful, I shall divide them into several degrees, and endeavour, in some measure, to trace their progression.—They are such sins as are committed against the light and conviction of our own minds—they are aggravated by the abuse of great and distinguishing mercies—or by insensibility, or a spirit of revolt under the judgments and corrections of divine providence—they have attained their ultimate progression when they come to be committed without shame—and, especially when they discover a zeal to ensnare, seduce, and corrupt others.

I. They are, in the first place, committed against the light and conviction of our own minds.

This character embraces every grade of them—if it extends to the highest, it reaches, also, the lowest. It is essential to their nature. This chiefly constitutes their guilt that they violate the dictates, and remonstrances of conscience. Conscience is our

natural law, and our natural judge.—It is more—it is the vicegerent of God in the bosom of man. All its dictates point to a higher source of duty in his will—all its reproaches point to a higher sanction in his justice. When, therefore we sin against its lights, it is, in the very act, to defy the authority of God our Maker. But no small portion of their guilt consists in their violating that reverence which a man ought to have for himself, and the law of his own breast. What though the darkness may cover him? What though no human eye may perceive him? He is his own witness—that judge is intimately conscious whom, next to God, he ought to respect and fear—before whom crime should tremble, and the impurity of the thoughts should cover him with shame.

A good man will cultivate a fine and delicate sensibility of conscience, that he may be able to perceive the minutest objects of duty, and discern even the remote approaches of vice; and he will study to illuminate it by all the lights which he can derive from reason, from reflection, and the word of God. A wicked man seeks only

to blind it, or to blunt its feelings; and, when he can blind it no longer, he hardens himself against its reproofs. And, is not he a bold and insolent offender who neither respects himself, nor fears the judge of the universe—who can venture upon acts of acknowledged vice in opposition to the conviction of his own mind—to the reproaches of his own heart—to the majesty and authority of the divine law, and the terrors of a judgment to come?

What then shall we say of that slothful neglect, or irreverent contempt of the house of God, and the ordinances of Christ which is the disgrace of a people who call themselves by his name, and which, in this age of imaginary freedom from the most sacred ties, infects so many of the professors of the gospel? What shall we say of that intemperance and debauch, the frequent reproach of our social meetings, and even of those conventions of the people, held under the authority of the laws, where the purest morals ought to reign in a free country? An intemperance that impairs the health—that wastes the profits of industry—that murders time—that overturns the habits and

principles of virtue—that destroys domestic peace, and entails misery and ruin on those who depend upon us? What shall we say of that injustice and fraud that, in so many shapes, has risen up among us? Not that which is cognizable by the civil law, and may be remedied by its tribunals, but that which escapes the eye and the arm of the law—that criminal speculation that tends, in its progress, to prostrate moral principle, and casts honor and honesty into the lottery of chances—that unfairness in dealing—those iniquitous advantages—those impositions on the credulity, the simplicity, or the necessities of others which can be proved, or punished only at the tribunal of conscience? What shall we say of that ludicrous jesting on the most sacred subjects, that indecency and impurity of discourse, which virtue cannot hear without disgust, nor delicacy name without a blush, that dishonour the convivial meetings of thoughtless youth, and, sometimes alas! even of profligate age? What shall we say of that impious profanation of the name of God, and those infernal imprecations that so frequently insult our ears both among the great and the little

vulgar? Just God! wilt thou not at length pour out that damnation on the head of the sinner which he audaciously invokes from thy justice?—Can men plead principle to vindicate, or ignorance to excuse these crimes? No; they are presumptuous offences—they are palpable violations of that inward law which God hath placed in the breasts of man to regulate his conduct.

II. The abuse of great and distinguishing mercies constitutes another aggravation, and forms a new class of presumptuous offences.

To enjoy the mercies of Heaven without thankfulness, especially, when we have been, in any way, distinguished by its goodness—and, still more, to enjoy them only to abuse them, is a proof of a depraved mind, and of a base and ignoble heart. Ingratitude is an aggravation of presumption.

These mercies may consist either in external advantages of fortune—in intellectual improvements—or in the means of religious knowledge and instruction.

If it hath pleased God to put it in the power of some men to enjoy the common blessing of existence with more dignity and satisfaction than others, by crowning them with affluence, or raising them to honourable stations, are not their vices marked with a guilt proportioned to their misimproved advantages in life? Yet, how often does the facility of gratifying their passions raise them above the controul of the laws of God? Perhaps no men are more prone to abuse his goodness, and to turn it against himself, than those who enjoy it in the greatest profusion. A pernicious idleness, profligate manners, impiety and licentiousness are at once their sin, and their disgrace. "Hear O Heavens! and give ear O Earth! saith the Spirit of God, appealing to all nature against these crimes, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me!—The *ox* knoweth his owner, and the *ass* his master's crib, but *Israel* doth not know, *my people* doth not consider."

How frequently, likewise, are their distinctions in society made to foster a spirit of unbecoming pride, insolent to mankind, and unthankful to Almighty God, as if all

that they enjoyed belonged to them by an independent possession; or, were the natural reward of superior worth and merit in themselves?—What! a worm of dust! a vain and gorgeous atom proud of the crust that it inhabits! proud before the Maker of the universe in whose presence all human distinctions are annihilated! Blind and impious presumption! These vain reptiles pervert the unmerited bounty of Heaven into hostility equally against God and man.

It is a still higher crime to employ in the service of impiety the advantages of natural talents, or intellectual improvements.

Such talents, or such improvements are capable of being employed to the best, or the worst purposes in human life. And the guilt of their misapplication is to be measured both by the good which they have not done, and by the evil of which they have been the active causes. What illumination and persuasive energy might they not have added to the principles of virtue and piety? What unhappy extension and force have they not given to the pernicious cause of infidelity and vice? Impious philosophers!

licentious wits! who study to shake the eternal foundations of truth and morals, and to destroy the salutary influence of religion on the human mind! how many crimes, not your own, will at last be imputed to you!

It is a lamentable proof of the corruption of human nature that the powers of genius, which should discover to man his own imperfection, and the profound and unfathomable depths of the divine wisdom, should so often serve only to intoxicate the heart, and to inflate it with vanity—should, instead of proving the blessing, prove the curse of mankind, by unsettling the principles of society and morals—nay, should carry this presumption so far as to attack the eternal source of light and truth itself, and place in its room the faint and dubious spark of their own reason. Ah! vain and purblind reason! It resembles a proud insect which, because it can emit a feeble and deceptive lustre in the dark, should pretend to eclipse the sun by the strength of its beam, and say, *I will enlighten the universe.*—Children of ignorance and vanity! the light of eternity shall bring a



dreadful refutation of your errors—the croud of victims to your delusions that you will meet there, while they demonstrate your guilt with a fearful evidence, will add augmented horrors to your condemnation!

To our abused mercies let us add the more common but inestimable blessing of the ordinances and instructions of the gospel—The lights and the motives which they add to duty greatly aggravate the guilt of those sinners who violate or who despise them. Hard must be the heart which resists the counsels of divine wisdom, and the invitations of divine mercy proposed in the gospel. And the truth is, that those who have broken through the restraints, and eradicated the principles of a pious education usually become distinguished in vice.—They are quoted by sinners to the reproach of religion, as they often become the reproach of human nature.—A sinner enjoying the light of the gospel, sins against the strong conviction of his own mind—against the authority of the divine law most clearly interpreted in the church—against the high and interesting prospects of eternity continually presented to his mind in the in-

stitutions of religion—and against the majesty and justice of God armed to enforce his law, and to punish its violation. But, that which chiefly enhances his guilt, is the abuse of the divine mercy so illustriously displayed to the world in the cross of Christ, and the profanation of his most precious blood. Despised mercy is often more fearful in its effects than insulted justice. When the presumption of impiety rejects the blessed victim of the cross, is it not boldly to invoke upon its own head those dreadful flames that have consumed in our room the *Lamb of God*?

III. Insensibility under signal judgments of divine providence, or a spirit of revolt under its strokes, and corrections, adds to sinning a character of high presumption.

Judgment, as well as mercy is intended for the reformation, and the cultivation of mankind. Frequently, when the goodness of God has ceased to make its proper impression upon a hard and impenitent heart, the strokes of his justice have at length brought it to reflection. It is stated by the holy-spirit, as a character of incorrigible and

hopeless impenitence in the nation of Israel, that the divine chastisements were no longer able to reclaim them. "Why, saith he, should you be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, the whole heart is faint." What shall we say, then, of those who can deliberately return from following their fellow sinners to the dust, whither they shall themselves be soon conveyed, to all their customary follies, and habitual vices? What shall we say of those who have their hearts torn by the most painful bereavments, and their hopes blasted, or their fortunes broken by a frowning providence, who never seriously consider the hand that smites them, that they may break off their sins by repentance, nor lay to heart the vanity of the world that they may *return to God as their exceeding joy*? What shall we say of those who, sinking under diseases induced by their own intemperance and profligacy, instead of being led to repentance by their sufferings, are still, with their remaining strength, pursuing the same crimes? What of those who, raging under their impotence to enjoy their licentious pleasures, or writhing under the pains which those pleasures have planted in

a ruined constitution, murmur at the will of Heaven, rebel against the stroke, or even blaspheme their Creator as the author of their miseries? Is not that a hard heart on which the judgments of God make no pious impression? Is not that a bold and criminal spirit that revolts against the corrections of a righteous and holy providence, and that will even go from suffering under the stroke to a repetition of the crime? When the sinner arrives to despise the fear of God, he seems to be forsaken of the last principle by which he might possibly be led back to his duty.

IV. Another step in the progress of vice is seen in the want of shame, and contempt of public opinion.

The common interests, and therefore the common sentiments of mankind will ever be connected with the great principles of virtue and good morals. These sentiments furnish the most powerful motives to order, decency, and propriety of conduct, and form, perhaps, the strongest, as well as the most delicate ties that connect society together. Laws may be called its chains—
W w

principles and opinions are its silken cords. Each singly may possess small force—but, infinitely multiplied and interwoven, they become stronger than chains. Nature hath subjected us to the sentiments of one another; and every modest and ingenuous mind will profoundly respect the opinion of the public. Sinners, who are not yet abandoned, study to conceal their crimes from public view, and to find for them the protection of obscurity and retirement. Therefore are they called *the works of darkness*, not only because they lead down to *the blackness of darkness forever*, but because they seek for themselves the deepest shades to cover them from the eye of the world. In the clouds of night riot and debauchery endeavour to hide their enormities—then theft and robbery come forth from their lurking places—malice and envy shoot their arrows in the dark—there lust spreads a veil over its shameful and impure mysteries. “In the twilight, saith Solomon, in the evening, in the black of dark night,” the bait is laid by loose pleasure for the unwary youth—“He goeth after her straight way, as the ox goeth to the slaughter, or, as a fool to the correction of the stocks,

till a dart strike through his liver—as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.”* As long as the sinner continues to seek concealment for his crimes, it is a proof of some remaining modesty of mind that is still capable of reformation. But when vice stalks abroad with an unblushing face—when intemperance staggers and vociferates in the streets—when fraud and injustice can come forth with the countenance of integrity, and ill-gotten wealth is considered as a substitute for honor, and for conscience—when lust seeks no veil for its orgies, and the most criminal connexions are avowed without shame, the last fences of piety and virtue are broken down, and the mind is prepared to go to any extreme to which appetite may impel, or opportunity invite.

Does the want of shame, it may be asked, mark a higher degree in the progress of vice than those characters of it which have been already named—resistance to the authority of conscience—ingratitude for the mercies of God—and impenitence under

* Proverbs vii. 9, &c.

his corrections?—It does—men are often restrained, by a principle of decency, from public and open vice long after they have lost the fear of God. Accordingly the prophet speaks of it as the consummation of the crimes of Israel, and the sure presage of the destruction of the nation. “Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall; at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down saith the Lord.”*

But, it is the proof of a still more obdurate mind when the profligate has arrived at the monstrous vanity of glorying in his shame. It is not enough for him to have overcome the modesty of nature, and to forget, or to despise the awful censure of the world; he hardens his countenance into brass, insults the public manners and sentiments, and braves the terrors of the Supreme Judge of Heaven and earth. Sometimes we see the horrid spectacle of youth who boast their scenes of riot and debauchery—

* Jeremiah vi. 15.

who triumph over the innocence they have betrayed—who repeat in the midst of blasphemies, their feats of intemperance and licentiousness—who, not contented with scaring the night with their crimes, dare to pollute the day with their shameful recital—who glory in being beasts, rather than in being men. Ah! what a corrupted taste! what hardened hearts!

Another class of these worthless men, equally weak in their understandings, and corrupted in their morals, lest you should suspect them of principle, or of being influenced by any remains of a virtuous and pious education, which they wish to be forgotten, boast even of vices of which they have not been guilty, and are ambitious of appearing adepts in iniquity before they have been able entirely to shake off the power of conscience, and the modesty and timidity of their first habits. They boast of licentious scenes, in which they have not been engaged, and of ruined chastity which they have never had the effrontery to attempt. Wretches! despicable to their companions, and worthy the abhorrence of all good men! even christian charity can hard-

ly forbear to mingle an indignant contempt along with her compassion for their deplorable folly.

But to virtue the most contemptible, and to piety the most afflicting example of this kind, is an old and decrepid sinner boasting that the profligacy of his youth. When indulgence has lost its relish—when passion is no longer an excuse for folly—when vice has no charms but in remembrance, to see the decayed and miserable remnants of a man exhausted in the service of sin, having no resource within himself, and in the affections and hopes of religion, endeavouring to excite his wasted appetites, and to tickle a sensual imagination by the recollection of scenes of brutal pleasure, is among the most deplorable of all objects. Age glorying in its shame seems to be the nearest resemblance on earth of infernal spirits who pursue absolute wickedness without interest, and triumph in it without enjoyment.

V. The ultimate degree in that fatal progression of vice which I am endeavouring to trace consists in a zeal to ensnare, seduce, and corrupt others.

Activity to extend the principles, and augment the numbers of a party is one of the most unequivocal evidences of sincerity in its cause. Many vicious men, contented with being guilty themselves, are willing to leave the rest of the world to follow their own inclinations. But the zealous partizans of impiety are ever ready to exert all their talents to give a pernicious extension to their corrupted principles. Hastening to ruin themselves, they are solicitous to draw others with them to the same perdition.—Some, through a perverted sociability, desire companions in their crimes only to increase their own enjoyments. Knowing no other satisfactions but those which vice affords, they esteem religion merely as the resource of our last moments when all the pleasures of the world are about to forsake us—or the occupation of weak minds who know not how to enjoy life. Having corrupted their taste to the relish of the most impure and tainted streams, they are not satisfied unless they stoop to drink of every stagnant and filthy puddle that has gathered in their way—others, deriving confidence from associates in guilt, are the more ambitious to disseminate the poison of their im-

piety. Notwithstanding their assumed audacity, something within still secretly misgives them, and mixes an uneasy doubt at the bottom of their pleasures. The apprehensions of guilt require, the influence of numbers to allay them, and to restore confidence to the heart. The sinner is a coward who often depends for his security and courage on the example of others. Hence that scandalous zeal which the profligate frequently discover to scatter the contagion of irreligious principles and to spread the infection of licentious manners.—But, not a few, still more malignant, study to corrupt the morals of others through enmity to the pure and humble spirit of piety. The bitterness of their hearts they vent in keen reproaches, and insulting scoffs—by seducing the unwary, and offering themselves as leaders to those who are yet but just entering on the paths of vice. Above all, if they can shake the faith of a believer in Christ, or corrupt one whose first inclinations were in favour of religion, with what malicious satisfaction they contemplate, or with what insolent mirth they triumph over, their deluded prey! It is not their own enjoyment which they seek in particular acts of vice.

nor the heightened enjoyment which associates in iniquity confer, but they derive an infernal pleasure from the ruin of innocence itself. Their malignity is gratified by being themselves the instruments of corrupting it.—This appears to be the last stage of impiety upon earth, and contains the most open, daring, and criminal hostility against truth and virtue.

In this class of sinners may be ranked, likewise, those numerous writers and artists who endeavour to corrupt the public morals by debauching the imagination, or by vitiating the public taste for amusement and pleasure. In the former, we often see vice rendered more seductive by an enchanting brilliancy of genius. The latter go directly to deprave the heart through the organs of the senses. Seducing images, indecent pictures, loose scenes, and an immodest wit contribute their aid to spread the infection of vice. Even those low diversions, which in many places are so eagerly sought after, by assembling the idle, the thoughtless, and the dissipated, and debasing the taste, are hastening the degeneracy of manners.—But what shall we say of those brothels of loose plea-

sure, and those places of ruinous gaming where youth so often throw away virtue, and honor and estate and health? Temples are they of iniquity—houses of pestilence whence the most dire contagion is spread through society. How criminal are the leaders and actors in these scandalous and corrupting scenes! Nor are those who encourage them by their presence, or support them by their contributions, free from a deep guilt.

• To these pernicious corrupters of mankind are to be added the pretended philosophers who, in the present age, are so assiduously striving to undermine the foundations both of natural, and of revealed religion. And for what end? Is it for the love of virtue? Alas! the very basis of virtue is destroyed when religion is taken away—Is it, as they so often profess, through regard to the interests of society, and the happiness of mankind? Ah! society without religion would soon become a chaos of passions and of crimes. What then is the motive of all this ingenious but perverted industry? Is it not to be found in enmity of heart against that purity and holiness

which religion requires? Is it not some vice of character that renders them obnoxious to the awful sanctions of religion. But, whatever it be, no sins can be more fatal in their consequences, or draw after them a greater train of ruin. Youth is corrupted—the foundations of society are shaken—reverence for the Deity is annihilated—his providence is denied—his justice set at defiance—his love in the redemption of the world profaned and insulted—the blessed Saviour again rejected of men!—If a zeal to make proselytes to the pernicious cause of impiety and vice is among the highest degrees of open and presumptuous sinning—if a fatal success aggravates the guilt, how criminal are you ye corrupters of the age! If the blessing of those who are ready to perish shall come upon the good man who hath contributed to their salvation, surely upon you shall come the blood and the curse of thousands who have been destroyed by your influence!

The illustration of this subject has run into so great length that your exhausted time will not permit me to make the numerous reflections that naturally arise from it, and

might be profitably improved. I shall content myself with one or two.

The first idea that suggests itself is the insidious nature, and the dangerous progression of vice. No man becomes abandoned at once. Secret faults precede open, and public vices—and, among these last there is a wide distance between the first violations of known duty, and that hardened profligacy which learns at length to sin without shame. Beware, therefore, of the beginnings of vice—they are like the letting out of water which soon encreases to a mighty flood. Its habits are incessantly advancing, and men frequently arrive, in the progress of time, calmly to perpetrate crimes on which they would once have looked with a degree of horror. *Break off, in season, your sins by repentance, and return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon you, and to our God and he will abundantly pardon you.* But remember that there is a point of impiety beyond which there is no more sacrifice for sins.—Deplorable is his state who has corrupted, or silenced the judge within him—who has torn away all the restraints of that internal law in his own

breast—who has violated conscience till it has ceased to speak. If he has arrived to sin in peace, it is only because he is abandoned of God, his peace is the dreadful calm that precedes a storm—and God is preparing the thunders that shall avenge his insulted truth and justice. How fearful are his decrees! “Because I have called and ye refused. I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded—but ye have set at naught all my counsel and would none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me but I will not answer, they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowlege and did not chuse the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel—they despised all my reproof: therefore they shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.”*

It would be in vain to address a reproof or an admonition to those hardened offen-

* Proverbs i. 24—31.

ders who have arrived at the highest degrees of vice—who have grown insensible to shame—who have become apostles of impiety, and leaders in profligacy. Seldom are they to be found in the house of God. They voluntarily place themselves beyond the reach of our remonstrances. I can only hold them up as beacons for your warning.—Ah! my young friends! let not the fatal progress of your own follies mark you out hereafter as beacons for the warning of others. Beware of the examples and the sollicitations to evil that assail you on every hand. *The time cometh* saith the apostle, *when the wicked men and seducers shall wax worse and worse.* Is not that time now? Hardly can youth walk abroad without meeting with criminal objects to invite, dangerous companions to solicit, scenes of temptation to corrupt them. Ah! how industrious are the champions of vice! Incessant in their labours to corrupt and to destroy—assiduous in mischief, as if they were honest men employed in a good cause, hardly can you escape the innumerable snares which they have laid for you. Trust not those false *illuminations* to which the vain pretenders to a monopo-

ly of reason have boldly laid claim, while they have only poisoned the minds of youth, corrupted manners, and torn asunder all the moral bands of society. Impious fanatics! *illuminated* only to themselves, and in the visions of their own fancy! another age will hold them in merited contempt—this age ought to pour upon them that indignation which is due to their multiplied crimes. Retire from the contagion both of their presumptuous folly, and their *presumptuous sins*. And may the *Father of lights* impart to you that *wisdom that cometh from above, that is pure, and full of good fruits*, for Christ's sake!

AMEN!

DISCOURSE XIV.

ON DEATH.

THE UNCERTAINTY OF THAT INTERESTING EVENT,
AND THE PROPER IMPROVEMENT OF IT.

MATTHEW XXIV. 42.

*Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour
your Lord will come.*

THE end of the world, and the period of life, to both which events our Saviour in this passage seems to refer, are equally involved in profound uncertainty; yet is it, perhaps of equal importance that we should always expect them, and always stand prepared to meet them. The judgment only announces to the universe the sentence that passes upon every soul at its separation from the body. The uncertainty of this latter period on which only I wish, at present, to fix your attention, ought continually to occupy the mind with the most interesting reflections. While the

Bridegroom delays his coming, those who are in waiting, expecting his appearance, should preserve their lamps trimmed and burning: and the exhortation which he addressed to the virgins in the parable he addresses to all—*watch, for ye know not what hour your Lord will come.* Yet is there no event which men are more prone to forget—which they study more to exclude from their thoughts than that which is forever to break their ties with this world, and to fix beyond it their immutable destiny. *As it was in the days of Noah*, in the age before the flood, *so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man*, and so is it commonly, in the case of each individual, with regard to that silent and constant flood that is sweeping before it all the inhabitants of the earth—*they did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark: and the flood came and destroyed them all.* Men are engaged in business, or in pleasure, in the plans of ambition, in the schemes of avarice, in the cares of fortune, in the pursuits of amusement, in the whirl of folly, till approaching, by imperceptible degrees, the

verge of the grave, in one dreadful moment of surprize, they plunge into it.

That we shall die, is a truth so manifest, and so frequently repeated, that it hath almost ceased to be felt. And the uncertainty of the time of our departure hence, which ought to keep it ever present to our view, is that very circumstance which human corruption lays hold of to make us forget it altogether.

This fearful *uncertainty* shall be the *whole subject* of our meditation at present.

It is a subject, however, so frequently treated of, and so constantly presented to us in the whole course of providence, that nothing new, nothing, indeed, that is not trite can now be said upon it. All that I can hope is to recall to your memory a few of those ideas which you have heard a thousand times repeated, and to endeavour to give them, if possible, a new impression on the heart.

“Of that hour knoweth no man.” Accordingly we see the feeble and the strong,

the humble and the great, the young and those in middle life, infancy and age mingled promiscuously in the dust. Death equally strikes at all ; and every moment from the cradle to the grave should be regarded as the possible moment of our own departure. Men are surprised in the midst of business, in the midst of pleasure, in the midst of the most firm health, in the midst of the flattering prospects of fortune that are opening round them—taken in the moments when they are least thoughtful, and, in their own apprehensions, the farthest from danger.

Life is a *fountain* fed by a thousand streams that perishes if one be dried—It is a *silver cord* twisted with a thousand strings that parts asunder if one be broken. Frail and thoughtless mortals are surrounded by innumerable dangers which make it much more strange that they escape so long than that they almost all perish suddenly at last. We are encompassed with accidents ever ready to crush the mouldering tenement that we inhabit—The seeds of disease are planted in our constitution by the hand of nature.—The earth and the atmosphere;

whence we draw our life, are impregnated with death—Health is made to operate its own destruction—The food that nourishes the body contains the elements of its decay—The soul that animates it by a vivifying fire tends to wear it out by its action—Death lurks in ambush about all our paths.

Notwithstanding this is a truth so palpable, and confirmed by daily examples before our eyes, how little do we lay it to heart! We see our friends and neighbours perishing around us, but how seldom does it occur to our thoughts that our own knell, perhaps, shall give the next fruitless warning to the world.

Would you have a picture of human folly and inconsideration? Imagine a multitude of children blindfold, and engaged in thoughtless sports, while death is walking in the midst of them shaking a fatal dart. He pierces one, and then another and another—Destruction overtakes them—their agonies seize upon them; but they know not whence the evil comes. The survivors are astonished for a moment; but, not perceiving the cruel murderer, they play on, and

the next moment they are pierced themselves. This is an image of men. They are blind to their approaching fate till it has overtaken them. That uncertainty which should forever place it before their eyes, they make the means of banishing it from their thoughts. All grounds are assumed by them, however contradictory, to flatter themselves with the delusive hopes of life. The healthy expect to live, because they do not perceive in themselves the symptoms of decay—The infirm expect to live, because their infirmity has become a habit—The young expect to live, because they have not lived so long as others—And the old, because they have lived longer. Who expects his last sickness till it has overtaken him? Who of the sick apprehends he shall die till his case has become desperate? And, even in the last agonies, frequently, does he not look to find some shred of hope, because life is still possible?—Oh! fatal deceiver! that forever blinds the sinner and cheats him of his salvation! that infatuates him with the world and makes him unmindful of his eternal state! that persuades him to trust to life, and hides the importance, and

even the certainty of dying in the uncertainty of the time of death!

If God, in some clear and manifest way, should indicate to us, as he did to Hezekiah, the term of our years, and give us assurance that, at such an appointed time, we should die, would not that fixed period continually occupy our minds? * Could we suffer it to escape a moment from our thoughts? Hurried perpetually across the interval between us and that instant that should decide our everlasting state, it would appear too short for the work we should have to do in it. The image of death, forever present, would efface the impressions of the world—it would render unlawful pleasures insipid and disgusting—we could feel no other interests but those that connected us with eternity.—If then death, seen at a distance, but at a certain and determined period, would so alarm, would so occupy our thoughts, would so detach the heart from the world, is it not extreme folly to suffer this solemn and interesting event, now, that it may arrive every moment, to slip from our minds?

* Maffillon.

Yet, such is the infatuation of men!—death, that is ever at the door—death that is ready to surprise them at those seasons when they least think of it—*death* is forgotten—and leaves the world, their passions, and their vices in full dominion in the heart. Like the *fool* they say, *my soul! take thine ease, thou hast much goods laid up for many years*: and because it is not clearly and unequivocally denounced to them, *this night thy soul shall be required of thee*, they live as if they were to live here forever.

Did this uncertainty regard merely the time, the place, or the manner of our departure hence, it would be a subject of comparatively little moment. To a sincere christian whose eternal interests are secure, it can be of small importance indeed whether he makes his change now or hereafter, according to the ordinary course of nature, or by some more sudden and unforeseen accident. In the favour and protection of God he is always safe. Whenever he leaves the world, he is delivered from a painful exile and brought, with unspeakable joy, into the presence of his heavenly Father.—If he arrives by a shorter, or a rougher path

than others, still he hastens home with delight, and the glorious recompence of his fidelity makes him forget all the dangers of the way—But the dreadful uncertainty to those who are *without God, and without Christ in the world*, is the uncertainty of their salvation.—Eternal happiness, and eternal misery are placed at the end of their course, and, as yet, they know not which shall be their portion. Onwards they are pressing through a short and doubtful pilgrimage, blindfold, and careless of the destiny that is before them. Ah! my brethren!—what is it you leave in this fearful state of doubt? The immortal interests of your souls!—You stand between Heaven and Hell, and it is not yet decided whether, with Lazarus, you shall be *borne by angels into Abraham's bosom*, and the eternal mansions of the blessed, or, with the rich sinner, you shall sink down to unquenchable burnings whence you shall *lift your eyes* in vain to the throne of mercy, *being in torments*. You are hastening to eternity—Concerns of infinite, and everlasting consequence hang on one brief, uncertain moment. Is this a situation in which you can possess your souls in tranquility? Can you compose yourselves to peace, and com-

mit your immortal happiness to hazard? Can any zeal, can any labours be too great to establish it upon solid and immoveable foundations? and to shed upon your last moments the blessed light of hope?—Oh! remember that this is not like the common uncertainties of life in which we may learn lessons of wisdom and prudence from our errors themselves, and time may enable us to repair the effects of past miscarriages—miscarriage here is irretrievable—the destinies of eternity are unchangeable.—God, who is the sovereign arbiter of the times and allotments of men assigns to some a longer, to others a shorter period—but, to none does he ever permit a repetition, or a prolongation of their trial. Death is the point that fixes their state for eternity.—According to the deeds done *in the body* they shall be judged. All their works press round the soul in that important and decisive moment, and follow her to the great tribunal. If they have been evil, no resource, no hope remains. On she must go to her destiny. Neither prayers, nor tears, nor vows, nor the anguish of perishing guilt can change, or suspend the fatal decree.

When we reflect, then, on the extreme uncertainty of life, and the infinite importance of dying well, what can justify that imprudent, that unaccountable forgetfulness of death in which the great mass of mankind seem profoundly buried? My young friends! do you rely upon your youth, as if just entering on the morning of life, they had a long day before them, and ample time to indulge in pleasure? Ah! youth is a tender flower that often decays as soon as it is blown. The tenderness and delicacy of the human frame in this period, its passions, its excesses, its indiscretions, its inexperience render it more exposed than any other age to fatal accidents. Do you trust to the vigor of your health? Not to mention how often we have seen habitual decrepitude and infirmity wrapped in the same thoughtlessness of their approaching change, what is health but a vapour scattered by the lightest breath? What is vigor but augmented fuel for the most violent disorders? How often have we seen the most luxuriant strength suddenly fall under the all-destroying scythe of death, as if God had mowed it down on purpose to shew how little we

ought to confide in it? If it were more durable than it is, what is the longest life allotted to man but a hasty vision that flies like a dream, as rapid, and almost as unsubstantial? Nay, what is the whole succession of ages since the commencement of time in which generations and empires have appeared and passed away like phantoms gliding over the stage? In relation to eternity, and the great work which we have to fulfil for eternity, how short!—Anticipated time seems long to the young and inexperienced, as if they had hours and days, and years to spare; but, when it comes to a close, and they look back upon it, it appears, as a moment, as a point, as nothing—it is vanished, and its duties, perhaps, remain unfulfilled. Life is fluctuating with perpetual uncertainty, and is hastening to lose itself in eternity. Vain mortals are borne down the stream of time as on the bosom of a mighty river on which they incessantly disappear and succeed one another in the midst of its tempestuous waves. At no moment are they secure—they ought therefore to be always prepared for an event that every moment may surprize them. *Watch, therefore, for ye know neither*

the day nor the hour wherein the son of man cometh.

This injunction of our blessed Lord to *watch* for his coming, may imply the faithful cultivation, and the active discharge of all the duties that are incumbent upon us both as men and christians. Universal holiness in *habit*, and, as far as possible, in *act* is the best preparation to meet our Supreme Judge. But, it is particularly designed to inculcate profound and habitual reflection on our mortality, and on the shortness and uncertainty of life. No exercise can serve more powerfully to detach the heart from the world, and to sanctify its affections. The interests of time which, when viewed alone, are apt to seduce man from his creator, lose their dangerous importance when brought into near and close comparison with eternity—pride is humbled and mortified when we look into the dust which is at once our origin, and our end—revenge is extinguished when we look up to the bar of God where our enemies and we shall shortly be judged together—in the grave are quenched the flames of all impure and sensual desires.—The prospect of death, there-

fore, should be continually before the mind. It should mingle its idea along with all the views and plans of life to render them temperate and sober—with all our occupations and engagements in the world to regulate, and give them a just direction—and even with all our pleasures and amusements to chasten and correct them.

The children of mirth and folly, and those who have hitherto lived only to please themselves, will, perhaps, esteem this an austere and gloomy morality. These melancholy reflections would poison to them all the happiness of life. To fashionable dissipations, and to thoughtless levity, I confess, they will not be very friendly. But, to enable us to live in the world as reasonable men, and as christians, nothing will contribute more than to remember our latter end—and to the true enjoyment of life, nothing will add more than the hope of immortality beyond the grave.—If death is formidable, it is guilt only that makes it so: and this is a new reason for cherishing the idea, and improving it to a pious use. It loses its terrors when we are able to look upon it with a good conscience. It is not

merely the pain of dying from which nature shrinks, nor the horror of forsaking a world which can have few charms to those who have experienced its vanity, its malignity, its insincerity—it is the apprehension of divine justice—it is the awful holiness of God, in whose presence the conscious soul is about to appear, that fills it with alarm.—Purify the heart, and you will see with tranquillity your change approach. How many holy men have met it, not with confidence only, but with triumph? What, indeed, has a good man to fear? Death robs him of nothing; for he is already mortified to the world—nay, death brings him to the possession of all that is most dear to him; for his treasure is in Heaven. It is but the gate to eternal rest already blest and sanctified by his Saviour's passage through it.—But, if it is an object of terror to you, will it be less so, by your not having thought of it, and prepared to meet it? Can you, by refusing to think, delay the fatal stroke? No, death is advancing with a sure but silent pace—he will strike at the appointed time; and not to have foreseen the blow will only aggravate its horrors.

What useful lessons, then, are taught us by the preceding reflections? One most important is *to set our affections on the things that are above, and not on things on the earth—to use this world as not abusing it, knowing that the fashion of the world passeth away.*

Why do we forget eternal interests only to place our hearts on those vain things that to-morrow are about to perish forever? To the cold and silent nations of the dead what are the riches, the honors, the pleasures that once occupied all their cares, and formed the objects of their incessant toils? What will they shortly be to us? Nothing on earth is durable—all things are hastening to corruption by a rapid and necessary progress. Where are those proud monuments of human greatness that once boasted a duration that would be coeval with time itself? Where is the vast succession of empires that once filled the earth with their glory and their crimes? Swept from the face of the globe, they have not left a vestige behind them of their fancied grandeur, except the few faint traces that history has gathered from the wrecks of time. If so many nations have vanish-

ed—if all their splendor, their tumult, their busy cares, their noisy mirth, their passions, their intrigues, their follies, and their crimes have passed away like a dream, and are sunk in eternal oblivion, what is the narrow span of human life? And where shall shortly be all those vain and transient things that now occupy our thoughts, and absorb our hearts? *The places that know us now, shall know us no more forever*—the objects that now engage us shall be left to amuse and cheat the folly of other times. Nothing will remain to us but what we have done for God, for the soul, for eternity. What madness is it then to waste our time, and our cares on these perishing possessions, while we neglect interests of higher and everlasting moment? In spite of all the proofs of their vanity which we have every day before our eyes in the death of our companions, our neighbors, and our friends shall we still set our hearts upon them as our chief good? Nay, frequently, in the death of others, shall we think only of the means we derive from it of improving our own fortune? Instead of being mortified to the world, and being led by it to serious and sober thoughtfulness on our own state, shall

we secretly exult at it, and use it only to form new plans of life, new projects of ambition, new schemes of pleasure? Alas! from the horrors and the ashes of the tomb shall those sparks come forth that rekindle our lusts with new ardor!* On its mouldering ruins shall we attempt to build our own stability and glory!

Finally, let the uncertainty of life urge upon every hearer, and especially on the young who are most prone to presume upon time, a speedy and earnest concern for *the things that belong to their peace*. Interests of infinite moment demand your attention—the time presses—and will you, like Felix postpone them to a period that may, probably, never arrive? “Behold, now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation.” God affords you the present instant to seek his mercy, the next is with him.—One moment of grace only is certainly yours, and do you need entreaties and remonstrances to urge you to put it to profit? Alas! almost all men have lost that pre-

* Massillon.

cious moment by delay. They promised themselves hereafter to repent; but death cut short their hopes and resolutions in the midst. And will you, ingenuous youth! in the spring of life, in the morning of an eternal being, with this fearful and instructive example before your eyes, be guilty of the same fatal error, and blast all the prospects of immortality? *Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.* Hasten to the door of mercy while it is open; for, if your Lord shall come and find you, like the foolish virgins, sleeping and unready, it shall be forever and inexorably closed. Similar warnings, I know, have been a thousand times given you from the word of God, and perhaps a thousand times forgotten. Shall this at last prove equally fruitless? It is in vain, O God! that mortals speak. Do thou thyself arrest the fugitive and giddy thoughts that escape from every impression we would fix upon them. Penetrate! Oh! penetrate with deep and effectual conviction the secure and insensible heart! Thine is the work Almighty God! Pluck these precious pledges of their parent's love from

everlasting burnings. To thine infinite mercies we commit them! *Gather the lambs in thine arms,* and bring them to thy heavenly fold!

AMEN!

DISCOURSE XV.

ON THE LAST JUDGMENT.*

 ACTS xvii. 31.

He hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

THE final judgment is an event the most sublime, the most awful, and interesting that shall take place from the commencement till the consummation of time. The everlasting destinies of angels and of men shall be decided by the supreme Judge arrayed in all the splendors of omnipotence, and seated amidst the flaming ruins of the

* The plan of this discourse was suggested at a very early period of life, by one of Mr. Durand's on the same subject. It being long, however, since I have read his sermons, a great part of which I have unfortunately lost, I am not able to make any references to particular passages which on my general principle, I would otherwise probably have done.

universe. If one ray of the divine glory overwhelmed Moses, almost consumed Isaiah, deranged, for a moment, the faculties of the disciples on the mount of transfiguration, robbed Paul of the powers of vision, and struck him, and his companions to the earth like dead men, what will be the full display of that dreadful magnificence with which the Eternal will appear to destroy the present system, and to announce to sinners and to saints the irreversible decrees of his justice!—But, it is not merely the splendor of the tribunal, the grandeur of the scene that surrounds it, nor the glories of the judge which, on this subject, ought to arrest our attention. We have a still more important interest in the irrevocable decisions that shall then be pronounced upon mankind—decisions that shall take their colour from our conduct in the present life—decisions founded in eternal truth and justice—decisions that shall place our destiny, beyond the power of change, in hopeless misery, or in everlasting felicity.

One of the most instructive and affecting truths in the whole compass of revelation is, that *God hath appointed a day in which he*

will judge the world in righteousness. What consideration ought to possess more powerful influence over human conduct? What can be more calculated to inspire men with a holy solicitude to approve themselves to God who judgeth the heart? It is with a view to promote this practical improvement of a truth so interesting that I have chosen to offer it to you at present as the subject of your meditations.

But I dare not attempt to represent the grandeur and sublimity of that scene—I should only impair it. I limit my view to ideas more simple, and, perhaps, more useful—to illustrate those characters of the judgment suggested in the text—its certainty—its universality—its equity—and the glory of the judge—For, of this, saith the Holy-Spirit, he hath given *assurance* unto all men that—he will judge the *world*—he will judge it in *righteousness*—he will judge it by *that man whom he hath ordained*. You have thus before you the whole plan that I propose to myself in the following discourse.

I. In the first place, I shall endeavour to establish the certainty of the doctrine that

God will, in the conclusion of the present state of the world, appear to judge it, and to assign to the righteous and wicked their respective rewards in happiness, or in misery.

I have no need to pursue this argument in detail before an assembly nursed and educated in the belief of the christian religion, and the hope of immortality. I shall, therefore, only recall to your minds, with the greatest brevity, the grounds on which it rests, that its evidence may give a stronger impression to those important and practical truths that are essentially connected with it. For this end, I purpose to exhibit to you, in the first place, some of the presumptions in favour of this doctrine which we derive from reason, and the general state of the world, before I appeal to the irresistible authority of the sacred writings.

An argument, of no inconsiderable force, for the certainty of a future judgment arises from the testimony, if I may call it so, of human nature—that is, the concurrence of all nations in the belief and expectation of this great event. We find it under some

form or other entering into the religious systems of the most civilized, and the most barbarous people.* It is written in the whole history of man. Whence this universal suffrage to a doctrine so terrible in itself, and that contains so little to invite the world to embrace it? From one, or, perhaps, from all of the following causes it seems probably to have arisen. From an original communication made by the Creator to the father of the race, from whom tradition has conveyed it to all his posterity from the necessary influence of this truth—on the order, and happiness of society—or from a native and indelible impression on the human heart, which connects the sentiment of the justice with that of the existence of the deity. Each of these ideas involves a new and important confirmation of the truth of the doctrine. Tradition, indeed, has often

* It was taught by the Bramins of India, by the Magi of Persia, by the Druids of Gaul, and in the Colleges of Egypt and Chaldea. It is discovered even among the uncultivated natives of America. And no one can be ignorant that the popular mythology of Greece and Rome contained the elements of a truth so grand and interesting, in the tribunal of Minos, in the happy fields of Elysium the seats of perpetual delights to pure and innocent souls, and in the dreadful abyss of Tartarus, its wheels, its vultures, its flames and the avenging furies that were supposed to persecute the guilty.

clothed it in vague and fanciful forms—it appears in a just and consistent light only in the sacred scriptures.

In addition to the proofs drawn from the history and mythology of nations, we derive others from certain original and universal sentiments of human nature. All men have a feeling of right and wrong in human conduct—vice is usually followed by compunction and fear—guilt is accompanied with a secret conviction of deserved punishment.—Whence these ideas, if we are not amenable to a law? If we are not accountable to a Supreme Judge? Such a law there is—we see it written on the face of nature—it is inscribed on the whole order of providence—we feel it impressed on the heart of man. *They shew, saith the apostle, the work of the law written in their hearts*, the conscience attesting it by its clear and powerful evidence, *their thoughts*, while they are acting, *accusing, or excusing their own conduct*.—Conscience, like a faithful friend, is continually reminding a good man of the inspection and approbation of his Maker and Judge. But, to the guilty, it often appears

like a boding spectre pointing to the last tribunal. Are then these sentiments vain? Do they conduct to no end? Do they point to no truth? Has God formed the nature of man with no design? Or, are all his feelings only the artful springs of a delusive mechanism? No—they are founded in truth.—They lead us to the most serious of all truths—that *God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.**

The same principle results from the partial and unequal distribution of apparent justice which takes place in the course of providence. Although reason clearly indicates that God must be the moral as well as physical governor of the universe, yet we look in vain, in this life, for that complete discrimination of characters, and for that

* Every *general sentiment* of human nature points to truth. The weakness of reason often renders us liable to error in the deductions which it draws from them; yet, at bottom they are always connected with what is true and right. In morals, the *general sentiments of mankind* are the genuine foundations of virtue, and the chief cement of society. They are forever leading man back to his duty in spite of the force of his passions, of the mistakes of reason, and the errors of theory.

clear and unquestionable apportionment of rewards and punishments according to desert which we ought to expect in the government of a righteous and holy God.—How often do we see vice triumphant, and virtue oppressed? Injustice and fraud grow great on the ruins of unsuspecting confidence? Seduction flourish, while betrayed and plundered innocence is abandoned to distraction, or perpetual tears? What rivers of blood have been shed by the murderous hands of ambitious tyrants? And how few of them have been arrested, like Belshazzar, by a sentence from Heaven, and in the midst of their impious pleasures, and their imaginary glory, have paid the forfeit of their crimes? On the other hand, do you not see them adorned with triumphs, crowned with glory, and their crimes themselves consecrated for virtues, and eternized in history? Where do we find in these events the equity of providence? That rigorous justice in the divine administration which reason, and the sentiments of nature force us to ascribe to God? Sentiments original, native, indellible—Sentiments that we can no more tear from us than our own

existence—Sentiments not inspired by education—not formed by men—not written, like the variable laws of nations, on brass and marble, that are corrupted by time, but engraven, by the finger of the Creator in the bottom of our being, and eternal as the soul. If these sentiments, then, are fountains of truth—if they conduct us, without obscurity, to certain and demonstrable conclusions, ought we not to expect that divine justice will, at some period, *vindicate the ways of God to man*? and that, after this mixed state of discipline which is necessary to try, and to form the infinite variety of human characters for a superior condition of existence, there will reign a clear, decided, and eternal justice in a future world? Thus, the dictates of reason refer us to a future judgment, and to a final and righteous decision of the everlasting states of men.

But, the christian rests not his belief of this truth on the probabilities of reason, however strong, but on the infallible evidence of divine revelation. “God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom

he hath ordained, whereof he hath given *assurance* unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." The evidence of this doctrine, therefore, rests upon the same basis with the evidence of christianity. The infallible word refers to it in many allegories and parables—asserts it in express declarations—its whole system of duties, promises, and threatenings necessarily implies it.

Of many parables spoken by our blessed Lord that obviously point to this great and awful event,* let me recal to you only that of the tares sown in the field along with the good seed,* which he interprets himself—"He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man—the field is the world—the good seed are the children of the kingdom, but the tares are the children of the wicked one—the harvest is the end of the world—and the reapers are the angels. As, therefore, the tares are gathered and burnt in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniqui-

* Matthew xiii. 24, &c. 37—42.

ty, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire—there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Of this fearful day there are, also, many strong and explicit declarations throughout the word of God. “The heavens, and the earth, saith the apostle Peter, are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men.”* And “Christ is ordained to be the judge of the quick and the dead.”† Even the signs and fore-runners of that day are distinctly pointed out—the earth shall be shaken to its foundations—the stars shall fall from heaven—the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. In the midst of this universal terror and consternation, “the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel, and the trump of God,”‡ and before him shall be gathered all nations.§ How awful then is the certainty of that day when the secrets of

* 2 Peter iii. 7.

† Acts x. 42.

‡ 1 Theff. iv. 16.

§ Matthew xxv. 32.

all hearts shall be revealed, and the eternal states of all men shall be determined!

I proceed to illustrate the remaining characters of the judgment suggested by the apostle in the text—its *universality*—its *righteousness*—and the *glory of the judge*.

II. Its universality embraces all men and all their actions.

“ And I saw, saith John, a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great stand before God. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and the grave delivered up the dead which were in them.”* “All, saith the apostle of the Gentiles, must appear before the judgment seat of Christ”†—princes and conquerors of the earth who thought that all power and judgment was committed to their hands, as well as the innumerable crowd of their subjects or their

* Rev. xx. 11, 12, 13.

† Romans xiv. 10.

slaves—the infant who has just looked into the world, and then closed its eyes upon it forever, as well as those who have moved in its active scenes, and have a train of works to follow them to the tribunal—the countless myriads that in all time have peopled the earth from the first man to the youngest of his sons, all shall appear in one vast assembly. What an astonishing spectacle! What grandeur does it add to the solemnity of the judgment! The trump of God re-animates the sleeping dust of so many ages, and calls from their tombs the unnumbered armies of mankind. Far as the eye can extend, you discern the immense mass agitated with hope and fear like the boundless ocean in a storm, and moving like successive waves to the tribunal to render their account and receive their sentence.—There none are too small to escape the penetrating eye of the judge—none are too great to be beyond the reach of his power. The lords of the earth mingle with their vassals in an undistinguished crowd. The sceptres with which they ruled the nations—the thrones that boasted to be eternal—the insignia of their vanity

—the monuments of their power—all are crushed, and perish in the ruins of the universe—they are all equally dust and ashes before the *King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords.*

I add that there all the actions of men, as well as men themselves, shall be brought into judgment.

In that “day God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.”* And every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”† “The Lord will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.”‡ *A book of remembrance is written before him of the whole history of human life.* Nothing can escape from his penetrating, and omniscient eye. Every covering that self-deceit had thrown over the heart, shall be pierced and stripped off. And actions, thoughts, designs, that had been long lost from recollection, shall be brought to light, and aston-

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* Romans ii. 16.

† Matthew vii. 36.

‡ 1 Corinthians iv. 5.

ish the mind with its own forgotten history. The errors and transports of a youth passed away in a continual delirium—the pursuits, the plans, the ardent occupations of middle life—the rooted habits of old age—the use we have made of our time—the employment of our talents—the excesses of our passions—the errors of our thoughts—the unaccomplished wishes of the heart—our omissions of duty—our actual sins—the sins of others to which we have unhappily contributed, all shall surround, and attend us to the tribunal, and form, with regard to the guilty, the basis of its fearful decree! Ah! how profoundly should we now enter into our own hearts, and search to the bottom, in order to purify it, the unknown abyss of iniquity that is concealed there! With what rigor should we judge ourselves that we may not be condemned with God!—Unhappy are they, and in the sure course to perdition, who suffer the guilty dream of life to pass away, without frequent, and serious recollection—without thorough examination and knowledge of their own character.—With infinite astonishment and confusion of soul will they first learn their own history, and their crimes at the bar of

Heaven, in the moment when they are going to be weighed in the balance of eternal justice.

III. This brings to view another, and still more important character of the final judgment—God will judge the world in *righteousness*.

This decisive trial shall turn on a full and complete comparison of the conduct of men with the divine law; and the sentence of the Judge shall be that only which the law had before pronounced. “I saw, saith John, the dead small and great stand before God: and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”* *The books were opened*—that is, says an ingenious interpreter, the books of the respective laws under which they had lived, whether the law of nature—the law of patriarchal revelation—the law of Moses—or the more pure and perfect law of Christ. Conforma-

* Revelations xx. 12. &c.

bly to this idea the apostle hath said, as many as have sinned without the *written* law, shall perish without *that* law, by the sentence only of the law of nature, and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.* — Beside them shall be placed the *book of life* the faithful record of human actions from the beginning of time. Thus, on one side, you see the laws prescribed for the conduct of men in *the books of the respective dispensations under which they have lived*; on the other, you see the history of that conduct contained in *the book of life*. There are written our privileges and opportunities, our mercies and corrections, and the improvement or abuse which we have made of them—There are written the numbers of our years, of our days, of our moments, and the duties, the crimes, the follies and even the omissions with which they have been filled up, or by which they have been marked. No uncertainty can exist, as at human tribunals, concerning the facts, more than concerning the law. They have all been inscribed, by the impartial hand of God himself, in the eter-

* Romans ii. 12.

nal books; in which are seen the causes from which they sprung—the circumstances with which they were accompanied—their relations to others—and their consequences to ourselves, and to mankind to the remotest time.

That no form of trial may be omitted—that nothing may be wanting to the perfect equity of the decision, our conduct shall be attested by the most faithful and incorruptible witnesses. Christians! your prayers, your tears, your self-denials, your active zeal, your successful labours in the cause of your Redeemer, or for the happiness of mankind, shall bear witness for you at the bar of God. Our Saviour himself points to the works of charity and benevolence performed by his people as the best and purest evidences in that day of their sincerity and faithfulness—"For I was hungry, saith he, and ye gave me meat—I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink—I was a stranger, and ye took me in—naked and ye clothed me—sick and ye visited me—in prison and ye came unto me."* Have you, then, been

* Mat. xxv. 35, 36.

eyes to the blind, or feet to the lame? Have you fed the hungry, or clothed the naked? Have you relieved the afflicted, and comforted the distressed? Have you instructed the ignorant, and brought the erring back to the way of truth and life? Have you contributed by your disinterested liberality, or your painful labours—by your active influence or your pious example, to diffuse among mankind the precious knowledge of divine truth, or to send to distant regions the glorious light of the gospel? These blessed monuments of your charity and zeal shall appear for you *in the day of the Lord.*

Parents! have you trained your children in the path of virtue, and the fear of God? Have you solicitously studied to promote their highest, their immortal interests? Have your counsels, your example, your persuasions, and your prayers early touched their hearts with the sentiments of piety, guarded them from dangerous errors, and conducted them in the way of everlasting peace? Precious witnesses! These dear and cherished pledges of your love shall rise up, and, in the face of the universe, shall call you blessed.

A cloud of witnesses shall accompany sinners also to their condemnation. All whom the unjust have injured—all whom the artful have beguiled—all whom the licentious have corrupted—all whom the voluptuous have seduced—all whom the profligate have, by their example, betrayed into vice—all whom the impious, by pernicious principles, have alienated from virtue—all who, by any influence, or even by any omission of others, have been involved in distress, or drawn into vice, shall rise up in the judgment to condemn them.

Above all, conscience is a witness that will raise a faithful and decisive testimony at that tribunal. All our actions, and all our principles of action, all our sins, and every defect of duty—our actual crimes, and the purposes of the heart that have never been brought into act—the evils which we concealed from the world, and those which we studied to conceal from ourselves, all shall be brought to light by it, and denounced to us with a voice louder than the thunders that rend the universe.—In this life, men stifle its dictates and remonstrances in a thousand ways. Business or pleasure pre-

vent its being heard—inclination and the habits of vice bias its decisions; and sinners, in the midst of their crimes, often live in a great degree of security and peace. But there, no more causes of self-deception can exist—nothing can arise to bias its judgment, or to stifle its voice. It speaks with fearful energy.—It anticipates the sentence, and vindicates the righteousness of the Supreme Judge. The sinner has not, in perishing, the miserable consolation of saying that his fate is hard or unjust. His frightful remorse confirms the decree by which he is consigned to *everlasting burnings*. *God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.*

IV. He will judge it, finally, *by that man whom he hath ordained*. Although he is man he comes invested with the glories of the Deity, and armed with the powers of omnipotence. Once he sojourned upon earth for our salvation; but his divinity was veiled under the frailties of human nature—he now appears upon the throne of the universe as the judge of *the quick and dead*, and the splendors of the godhead seem to have absorbed in themselves all that is human.

—What language can describe, or what thought can comprehend that power that, with a word dissolves the worlds which, with a word, he had created? Who can conceive of that celestial effulgence that will make the radiance of the sun look like darkness—that would consume mortals if they were admitted to behold it—and that will require the regenerated powers of immortality to enable them to sustain the view. Ah! what a difference between the manger and the stalls where oxen fed, and the glorious throng of heavenly *powers and dominions* that now encircle, and wait upon their Lord! What an infinite disparity between the cross on which he expired for the redemption, and the throne on which he sits for the judgment of mankind! But, on this subject, language is impotent, and the mind fatigues itself in vain to grasp those boundless ideas.

His glory and majesty are heightened by the dreadful effects of his power, and the infinite decisions of his justice.—Of each let us take a short review.

John beheld him in vision, and "the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood—and before his face the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together."* "In that day, saith the apostle Peter, the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat—the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up."† From the foot of his throne issue the thunders that rend the world to pieces, and the lightnings that set it on fire. In his hands he carries the fates of men and angels. In one, he holds the treasures of divine mercy—in the other he bears the stores of the *wrath of God*.—Seated in glory inexpressible, he calls mankind to judgment—he hears their pleas—he examines their life—he produces before them the testimony of their works.

At length, it remains for him only to pronounce the decisive sentence. The trumpet, the thunders, the lightnings, the earthquakes, and the flames have done their

* Rev. vi. 12—14.

† 2 Peter iii. 10.

office, and the desolated universe is held in profound silence. Already the fatal separation of the wicked is made from the righteous. According to his own representation in his blessed gospel, the righteous are collected on his right hand, like innocent *sheep* under the protection of a tender and affectionate shepherd—the wicked, like pursued and trembling *goats*, ranged on his left, expect his dreadful decree. Directing himself to the right with infinite complacency, he addresses those pure and virtuous souls who have been redeemed out of all nations, “come ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”—And, instantly, you behold *new heavens, and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness*, springing from the ruins of the old, dressed in celestial beauty, and prepared to be the immortal habitations of the blessed.—Then turning to the left—this is not a picture of fancy—it is not the structure of a heated imagination that often builds its fables on unreal grounds, it is *the word of God*—turning to the left, he pronounces on the guilty the fearful decree of eternal justice—“depart ye cursed into everlasting fire pre-

pared for the devil and his angels"—Instantly all the thunders of heaven break upon them; and down they are impetuously, and irresistibly driven into the unfathomable abyss of fire and sulphur, whence *the smoke of their torment ascendeth for ever and ever.* The tremendous covering of Hell closes upon them, and the everlasting bolts of its fatal doors are shot by the hand of the Almighty.—Oh! my soul! come not thou into their secrets, nor be partaker of their end!

My brethren, this sublime, and awful termination of the world has not been revealed by God as a subject merely of curious science. I have not chosen it to amuse the season of public worship, or to gratify that love of grand and marvellous scenes so natural to man. It is a subject in which we have the deepest interest, and which claims to have the most powerful influence on human conduct. It is, indeed, one of those truths most important to morals. Morals can have no existence among mankind independent on the idea of immortality, and, connected with this, of the final and righteous judgment of God. *Seeing all*

these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?

Before that omniscient Judge, in whose presence the heavens are not clean, no impurity can pass uncondemned, no hypocrisy uncovered, no self-deceit undetected. Our whole history shall be developed. And *every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.* What an air of solemnity does this consideration throw over the whole of life! Over its most vacant as well as its most busy moments! Over its lawful amusements, as well as its serious offices! They all have a relation to that day of trial, and to our everlasting state. This life, otherwise so vain and fleeting, acquires hence a reality and substance. The judgment stamps every moment of it with some character of immortality.—Whatever, therefore, you undertake or do, in the lightest pastimes, as well as the most important duties of life, raise your thoughts to that decisive tribunal, and demand of your own heart, what account shall I render of *this* to God my judge? A wise and good man will do nothing which he will fear to have re-

vealed at his bar—he will engage in nothing in which he will not be willing to be found at his appearance.

But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? He who hath clean hands and a pure heart. Purity and virtue only, sustained by the promise and the grace of the Redeemer, can appear serene and undismayed amidst the universal consternation. Virtue is a mail of adamant that cannot be hurt in the convulsion of worlds. The good man, with humble and devout triumph, from the midst of the chaos, lifts his eyes to the tribunal, and in his Judge, beholds his Saviour.—But guilt will aggravate its horrors a thousand fold. Then shall they cry to the mountains and the rocks fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand? Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye look for such things, be diligent that ye be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.

Finally, God hath left this day in an interesting, and awful uncertainty that we

may not presume upon time, but hold ourselves always ready for its approach. *Stand, therefore, with your loins girded and your lamps burning; for you know not what hour your Lord will come. At midnight, in your most secure and unsuspecting moments, the cry may be made.* We have no assurance that he is not even now preparing his throne.—And if, at this moment, he should descend—if the heavens above our heads were cleaving to make way for the Judge—if the flames were now seizing on the universe—and the trumpet of the Arch-Angel were calling the living and the dead to judgment, how are we prepared for the great event? Where should we stand? What would be *your* destiny my brethren? O *my soul!* what would be thine?—Although the period of the world is not arrived, Death, who is the messenger to arrest us for judgment, is always near, and ready to seize upon his prisoners. And in whatever state he lays upon us his frozen hand, he seals us up to the day of retribution. My beloved brethren, let us, therefore, be ever prepared for the moment of our departure, as for the awful and decisive moment of our judgment. And grant, O righteous and merciful Judge

of the world ! through the merits of thy
own most precious death and resurrection,
that, in that day, we may stand at thy right
hand, and rise with thee to everlasting life !

AMEN !

DISCOURSE XVI.

ON THE HAPPINESS OF GOOD MEN
IN A FUTURE STATE.

REVELATION XIV. 13.

*That they may rest from their labors, and their
works do follow them.*

THIS is the benediction pronounced by the Spirit of God on those who *die in the Lord*. It was probably delivered to that beloved disciple, and evangelical prophet, who is generally held to be the writer of the revelations, during the rage of some of those destructive persecutions that wasted the primitive church. The faithful disciples of Christ, were then often called to seal with their blood, their attachment to their Lord, and to the precious truths which they had received from him. Their way through life was encompassed with

enemies, they were engaged in frequent and arduous conflicts, exposed to perpetual dangers, and were daily obliged to meet death surrounded with those circumstances that render it most formidable to the weakness of human nature. To console and support them under so many sufferings and trials, this gracious benediction was pronounced. But it is not confined in its application to the martyrs who glorified their Saviour by an illustrious, but painful death. As every part of the word of God is of general use, so this is applicable to every believer who *dies in the Lord*—who sincerely professes his name, in the midst of a sinful world—who is educated in his school, and imbibes his spirit—and who is united to him, as a member to the head, by a vital faith. In virtue of this intimate and indissoluble relation they triumph with him over the miseries of life, over the power of sin the source of all our other evils, over the terrors of death, and over the dominion of the grave.

The world is filled with many causes of affliction and distress to every good man, that must render the grave to him at length a desirable retreat. And the promise of

eternal life, after his labors and sufferings are terminated here, offers to his hopes a state of peace and felicity, after which he must often secretly sigh—*He shall rest from his labors, and his works shall follow him.* Of these expressions, both of which are figurative, the first implies a profound and eternal repose, not only from all the *fatigues* of duty, but from all the agitations, the conflicts, the griefs, the miseries, that afflict this mortal state. The second points to the felicity of a *true believer*, when he shall finally receive the reward of his virtue, and especially of his pious and faithful labors in the service of his Redeemer.

It is with a view to illustrate, as far as without presumption I may attempt it, the future happiness of good men men, I have chosen the text, which I make the ground of the following discourse.

They rest from their labors, and their works do follow them.

These figures point out to them a double source of happiness—Rest, and Enjoyment.

They *rest from their labors*, from their toils, from their sins, from their temptations, from their services, from their sufferings in the world—their *works follow them* as the foundation of their eternal felicity in the kingdom of Heaven.

I. In the first place, the happiness of the pious in the future state may be considered as a delightful rest from the necessary evils and sufferings of the present life.

The pilgrimage through which man is destined to pass, is beset with dangers, and exposed to almost continual causes of affliction and pain. However we may attempt to exaggerate the enjoyments of the world, or paint them in the delusive colouring which the imagination is prone to give to the pleasures of sense; certain it is that the most virtuous, and the most happy of men, are agitated with innumerable solitudes, and have innumerable miseries to deplore, before they submit to death the last of human miseries upon earth. Youth, which is ever sanguine and full of hopes, may not feel—prosperity, which is too often blind and delirious, may deny the reality

of this representation; but time will verify it to all men.—Has not time verified it already? Who is there who can say that he *is* happy? He only hopes *to be* so. It is hope, not possession, that forms the principal happiness of life. Were we cut off from the resource, and, may I not call it, the fallacious solace of hope, the world would have little left by which to attach us to it. When we consider how much we suffer in the present state, from the errors and the weakness of the understanding—from the heart, that anxious seat of so many irregular appetites, and tumultuous passions—from want—from the hatred or contempt of others—from the loss, or the afflictions of our friends—from reverses of fortune—from disappointed expectations—from pains and diseases that prey upon the body—from secret griefs that undermine and consume the health—from the murderous weapons of avowed enmity—from the arrows shot in the dark by envy, calumny, and perfidious friendship—What a wretched habitation is the earth? What a desirable retreat is the grave? Death yields us, at last, a delightful rest from so many evils. It

breaks from man the fetters by which he is enchained to his miseries.

As these miseries flow from sin as their primary cause; so sin itself is esteemed by a good man, the greatest of his evils. From its hated and lamented tyranny, he finds in death a complete and eternal rest. He is delivered from temptations that so frequently harrassed him, that put his virtue to the most painful proofs, and often shook it to the foundations—he is freed from the errors and prejudices that had covered his mind with distressing clouds, which perplexed and obscured to him the law of his duty—he is forever purified from those frailties and corruptions which, notwithstanding his sanctification, still adhered to him in this world, wounded his peace, and daily penetrated his heart with grief at the throne of grace. In the grave he puts off this body of sin and death, and his soul, admitted to its heavenly rest, has no more pains to endure, no more conflicts with the world, and its own rebellious passions to maintain, no more imperfections to fill it with regret or to cover it with shame, no more wants to satisfy, no more evils to suffer, no more tears to shed.

No more shall he offend God, infinitely holy and good, whom he adored and loved, even in those moments when the frailties of his nature led him into sin. No more shall he be exposed to the secret snares, or open assaults of temptation, nor to those invitations and opportunities so dangerous to the passions. Freed from the irregular impulses of the senses, of the imagination, of the heart, and delivered from an impure and imperfect nature, he shall sin no more.—From an elevated point of view, looking back on all the journey of life, contemplating its evils, and its dangers, which he has just escaped—its follies, its offences, and its falls which have so often dissolved him in repentance before the footstool of divine mercy, with what unspeakable satisfaction will he see himself arrived at a state of everlasting repose from all his sufferings, and his fears; and placed, by the power and grace of God, in a happy and eternal impotence of sinning!

I add, that the believer in dying, forsakes this wretched world, in which he had lived, in submission to the will of God, as in a strange land, and arrives at

his proper home; that land of peace and rest which he had so long sought to find, and to which he was continually tending in the affections and desires of his heart.—The earth, to a good man, is a state of exile from all that he most fervently loves, and from the sources of his dearest pleasures. He is surrounded with all the fatigues, and anxieties, the distresses and wants which accompany that afflicted condition; and from them all he gains, at death, a delightful repose in the bosom of his heavenly country. The children of this world, enslaved to their appetites, whose pleasures do not rise above its sensual and corrupted sphere, cannot enter into these ideas. The present life bounds their enjoyments and their wishes; and this world in which they would be willing to live forever, they cannot regard as a place of exile. But those righteous souls who thirst after immortal perfection, and continually aspire after nearer access and conformity to God, feel themselves to be only *pilgrims and strangers upon earth*, and while they pass through this vale of tears, they sigh for a *better, that is an heavenly country*—for that *city that hath eternal foundations, whose*

*builder and maker is God. Often they resemble the exiled and disconsolate Jews by the rivers of Babylon, when they hung their harps upon the willows, and sat down and wept when they remembered Zion. They are in a foreign and hostile land. All their pleasures and their hopes are placed in the new Jerusalem, in the heavenly Zion, in the city and temple of the living God. How often, under the lively impressions of the divine word; or in devout retirement, wrapt in the contemplation of heavenly things, have they been ready to cry, with the holy Psalmist under the pressure of his troubles, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I flee away and be at rest."** Blessed citizens of Heaven! banished, at present, to these abodes of misery and vice, death shall ere long furnish you with the wings you desire. Then, taking your immortal flight, you shall enter the delightful regions of that celestial country which, unseen, you love, and take possession of your celestial and everlasting home. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; for they rest from their labors, from their sufferings,*

* Psalms lv. 6.

from their sins, from their griefs, from all the fatigues, the solitudes, and pains of this mortal exile.

The road of virtue was said by the ancients to be up-hill, and to rise along the side of a mountain, every where filled with craggs and precipices of steep and laborious ascent, and encompassed with dangers that require the greatest vigilance and fortitude, to escape or overcome. This representation has so much truth that the faithful discharge of the duties that lie upon us as men, as citizens, and as christians, requires the most vigilant attentions, and frequently the most arduous, painful and persevering labors. And the difficulties and oppositions with which we meet from our hearts, from our infirmities, and from the world, will never suffer us to intermit our attentions, or to cease our exertions.

Some labors, and solitudes there are peculiar to the ministers of the gospel, or, if not peculiar, which affect them in a higher degree than other men, arising from the hostilities of the world against religion which they are called to combat—from the crimes

of sinners against which they have at once to remonstrate and to pray—from the errors or the coldness of the visible disciples of Christ, over which they are obliged in secret to weep—from the pride and insolence of power and wealth which are ready to trample with contempt on an humbled and mortified profession—from the infirmities and sins of their own hearts which afflict them so much the more as their calling is more holy, and as, ministering at the altar, they approach nearer to God than other men—in a word, from the arduous functions in which they are engaged. Although many consolations accompany the duties of a pious minister of religion, when he considers that all the sacrifices he makes, and the pains he endures are for the glory of his Redeemer, and the highest interests of mankind, yet they are often attended with fatigues that exhaust the body, and cares that harass the mind, and often are they embittered by many secret causes of affliction and grief. From all these evils he obtains at death an everlasting release in that blessed region, where “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying;

neither shall there be any more pain.³³
 “ And the ransomed of the Lord shall come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; and they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”† Oh how desirable to retreat from all these griefs, these conflicts, these wearisome toils, these anxious cares, to an eternal rest! A rest where the service of the Redeemer, which forms the glory and felicity of the pious soul, shall never be intermitted; and where it shall be forever free from all the imperfections that mar, and from all the sufferings that afflict it in this mortal state. As the first subject of consideration concerning the future happiness of good men, suggested in the text, is Rest,

II. The second is enjoyment—“ their works do follow them.”

This figurative language evidently points to that high and *positive* state of felicity which the saints shall enjoy in heaven, which is the consequence and reward of their works.

* Revelations xxi. 3.

† Isaiah xxxv. 10.

It conveys to us also, in the mode of expression, two other truths of the highest importance—the first, that the habits of a holy life are necessary to qualify men for the possession of heaven; because, without them, they neither could desire it as their abode, nor could they enjoy the pure and spiritual pleasures that constitute to the pious, the happiness of the place.—The second, that their rewards there shall be proportioned to the advances they have made in the divine life; and to the labors they have endured, the dangers they have encountered, and the services they have performed for the benefit, and above all, for the salvation of mankind, which is the service of Jesus Christ, their master and their Lord. On this subject the apostle Paul hath taught us, “he that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully shall also reap bountifully.”* There is one glory of the Sun, and another glory of the Moon, and another glory of the Stars, and one Star differeth from another in glory; so also shall it be in the resurrection of the dead.”† The most pi-

* 2. Cor. ix. 6.

† 1. Cor. xv. 41—42.

ous, faithful, and successful servants of Jesus Christ shall shine with the highest lustre, and enjoy the most consummate happiness in his eternal kingdom. What an animating motive was this to the fortitude of the primitive martyrs! What an illustrious, what a divine encouragement is it to the duty of every believer in Christ! If he does not reap his reward in this world, he shall receive one proportionably more rich and glorious in the world to come; where "the wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever."* Let us my brethren, remember, however, the great and fundamental doctrine, laid by the apostles at the foundation of our hopes, that "it is not by *works of righteousness* which we have done, but by *grace* we are saved." Those works cannot be presented at the throne of divine justice, as forming any absolute claim to the rewards of heaven; but they become, by the gracious promise of God, the title of a believer to a recompence that infinitely transcends any claim that can be grounded on the merit of human obedience. They

* Dan. xii. 3.

follow him, not as a meritorious measure ; but as measuring, so to speak, the infinite proportions of divine grace and of heavenly glory.

The gradations of rank, splendor and felicity in the kingdom of heaven, are but faintly and obscurely marked to us in holy scripture. It is more easy to impart to minds like ours some general apprehensions of the glory and perfection of the state of heaven, than nicely to trace its degrees. A scale of this kind requires a knowledge of the subject more accurate and just than our limited faculties are able to receive even from the holy spirit of inspiration. Such a *scale* was not necessary to the end for which this revelation was made to the divine St. John, which was to encourage the martyrs in their mortal conflicts. Their cruel sufferings and their unshaken firmness, would indeed, procure for them a *higher rank* in the order of the heavenly state, than others should attain, who had not been called to give the same heroic proofs of their fidelity to their Lord. But it is the expected *glory and felicity* of that state, that sustains the

courage of a christian, and enables him to triumph over the most formidable pains of death.

This felicity and glory is the subject chiefly pointed at in the text, and that to which without entering into any representation that must at best be fanciful, concerning the economy, and the gradations of rank that may take place in the kingdom of God, I shall limit my view in the remaining part of this discourse.—But how shall we describe that which *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard*, and of which it hath not *entered into the heart of man* to conceive! It would require the colours of heaven and a divine pencil to represent that celestial “city which hath no need of the Sun, neither of the Moon to shine in it; for the glory of the Lord doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of it, and there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”*

* Rev. xxi. 23, 24—27.

The improvements, and the sublime perfection of human nature shall be correspondent to the glory of its habitation. But both, perhaps, are equally out of the reach of our conceptions at present. We must actually have attained, before we can fully comprehend, those immortal powers with which the *body* shall be raised from the grave, and re-united to the soul, purified and exalted by a nearer approach to God. It is raised saith the apostle in incorruption—in glory—in power.——It is raised a *spiritual body*!*—Mark that bold and extraordinary figure. It is allied in its essence to the immortal spirit—composed of the most pure and active principles of matter that resemble the purity and activity of the soul—incorruptible in its organization like the diamond—splendid in its appearance like the sun—rapid and powerful in its movements like the lightning; that bears in its course an image of the omnipotence of the Creator.

The *soul*, purged from the dregs of sin, shall bear a higher resemblance of the perfection of God in whose image it was first

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* 1 Corinthians xv. 42, 43, 44.

created. Its intellect shall be boundlessly enlarged—its affections shall be directed with immortal and unceasing ardor to the eternal source of love—and we have reason to believe that it shall enjoy the power of unlimited excursion into the works, and, if I may speak so, into the essence of the Deity.

On a subject of which it is so far beyond the present powers of the human mind adequately to conceive, it becomes us to speak with modesty and caution. In judging of it, reason affords no lights to guide us—the fires of the imagination will only mislead us—we must take our ideas solely from the scriptures of truth. And when we collect together all that those sublime oracles of wisdom have said upon this subject, and take from the whole, those general views which they give of the state and felicity of Heaven, we may range them under the heads of its *glory*—its *immutability*—and its *eternity*.

Its glory—"It doth not, indeed, yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."*—There the

* 1 John iii. 2.

redeemed shall dwell in the presence of God, who alone can fill the unlimited extent of their desires—there they live in the delightful exercise of an eternal love, and in the full possession of all that can render them supremely blessed—for, “in his presence is fullness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures forever more.”*

There they cease not celebrating in songs of extacy, the infinite perfections of God, and the boundless riches of redeeming love. “Hallelujah! Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power unto the Lord our God.”† Worthy is the Lamb that was “slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!”‡ There, according to the emblematical language of the revelations, they are seated on thrones, and receive from his hands celestial diadems—for, saith the spirit, “they shall reign with him forever and ever.”§

If human nature, notwithstanding all its present imperfections, is destined to

* Psalms xvi. 11.

† Revelations xix. 1.

‡ Revelations v. 12.

§ Revelations xxii. 5.

such improvement and felicity, much more is it reasonable to believe that the eternal habitations of the pious, and the temple of the immediate presence of God, are infinitely superior in splendor and glory to all that we now behold in the sublimest, or the most beautiful works of nature. When this veil of sense shall be withdrawn, what an unutterable scene of wonders shall be disclosed! Imagination cannot picture them, language cannot describe them, we have no powers, at present, capable of admitting or sustaining the view. Could we suppose a mole that grovels in the earth, enveloped in absolute darkness, and circumscribed to a few inches, to be endued with the powers of vision and reason, and suddenly admitted to contemplate, with the eye of Gallileo, or the mind of Newton, the splendors and boundless extent of the universe, its ravishments, its transports, its extasies, would afford but a faint image of the raptures of the soul opening her immortal view on the glories of that celestial world.

But the glory of the heavenly state consists not only in the augmented powers of

human nature, and the external magnificence that adorns it, but in the holy and devout, and, may I not add, the benevolent and social pleasures that reign there.

There “the pure in heart see God,”*—there they “know even as also they are known”†—there they love without sin him whom it was their supreme delight to contemplate and to love on earth.—And if, with the divine philosopher of Greece, I may venture to speak so, there they mingle themselves with God.—But this is a subject which I dare not touch. I fear to profane it by the imperfect colouring, or the misguided fervors of sense.—Sometimes the humble and devout believer, in the communion of his soul with God, or in the celebration of the precious mysteries of his grace in his temples here below has enjoyed such discoveries of his infinite goodness and mercy as have been almost too powerful for the feeble frame of flesh and blood—Ah! what then will be the manifestations of Heaven! My beloved brethren, an Almighty power, a

* Matthew v. 8.

† 1 Corinthians xiii. 12.

celestial regeneration will be necessary to enable you to sustain the unutterable bliss!

I have ventured to mention also the social and benevolent pleasures of that state. And it will not, perhaps, be the smallest part of the felicity of pious souls to enter into the society, to participate the joys, and to receive the congratulations of those perfect spirits who have never fallen from their rectitude, and of the saints redeemed from among men, who have gone before them to take possession of their promised rest.—“There is joy in Heaven, saith Christ, over one sinner that repenteth*”—how much greater will be their joy, when he has escaped the dangers of the world, when he has no more cause of repentance, when he has kept the faith, when all his conflicts and temptations are finished, and he has arrived at the end of his course where nothing shall even be able again to shake the security of his state, or to impair the plenitude of his happiness? What high enjoyment will it be to meet there his fellow travellers through the dangerous pilgrimage of life, escaped

* Luke xv. 7.

from its pollutions and its snares. To meet there with "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets," with all the holy apostles and martyrs of Christ! To meet there the friends who were most dear to him on earth, whose souls were mingled with his! To meet there his fellow Christians out of every denomination, on whom, perhaps, he had been accustomed to look with distrust and jealousy! Nay more, to meet there devout men like Cornelius from every nation under Heaven; and to see the grace of God infinitely more extended than those narrow limits which probably his prejudices had prescribed to it! What immortal consolations must fill the breasts of those who "are come unto mount Zion, unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the Church of the first born, who are written in Heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.*"

The immutability of the happiness of Heaven is another character of it, that deserves our consideration. The power of

* Hebrews xii. 22, 23.

God will place the redeemed beyond the influence of temptation and sin, and the perfection of the heavenly state will forever exempt them from all those causes of frailty and change that exist upon earth. It knows no change except that of continual progression. The principal value of all our sources of enjoyment in this world is destroyed by their instability. Every object here is mutable, and disappoints those who expect permanent felicity from it, and *pierces through with many sorrows* those who attempt to lean upon it. Even the comforts that flow from religion in the present life are variable and uncertain, because the sanctification of the believer is still partial and imperfect. But, in Heaven, being perfectly holy, he shall be completely and immutably happy.

Eternity is the idea that crowns and enriches the whole. "There shall be no more death," saith the *amen*, the faithful and true *witness*. The felicity of the saints, like the being of God, shall be interminable.—Glorious and consolatory truth! I would willingly assist your minds to frame some measures of an immortal existence, but how

shall we measure a subject that so far surpasses our feeble conceptions? Number the stars that fill the sky—reckon the sands upon the sea shore—count the drops in the immeasurable ocean—compute the atoms that compose the globe—multiply them by millions of years, and when this amazing succession of duration shall have been finished, and repeated as many times as are equal to its own units, eternity will be but beginning—Beginning! It cannot be said to be begun. It is wrong to apply any term which measures progression, to that which has no period.

In this astonishing and boundless idea the mind is overwhelmed! What a glory does it shed over the *inheritance of the saints in light*! How strongly is it calculated to awaken the desires of a believer after the *rest that remaineth for the people of God*! I may add, how well is it fitted to console those who mourn over their friends who sleep in Jesus! If, at any time, the mind is ready to sink under the weight of its sufferings in the present life, and to repine at the will of God, will it not become patient, and even thankful again, when it looks forward to that immortal blessedness to which every

calamity that tends to crush this frail tenement of clay, is only hastening our passage? "For our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."*

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord! yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them!

What a consolatory, what a sublime and glorious object is here presented to the faith and hope of good men, and confirmed by the faithful asseverations of the spirit of truth! All the sufferings, induced by sin in the present life, there come to an everlasting period—all the joys that human nature exalted and improved with immortal powers can sustain, shall be possessed by the redeemed, and shall continually increase in an endless progression. There you behold them in the midst of their heavenly country from which they shall be no more exiled—there they contemplate without a veil,

* Cor. iv. 17, 18.

in the clear unclouded vision of heaven, the adorable perfections of God—they behold him enthroned in glory ineffable, whence he dispenses happiness to countless myriads of blessed spirits—Rivers of pleasure issue from the foot of the eternal throne—they bathe themselves in those pure and celestial streams—they are absorbed in ecstasies of divine and immortal love.

My brethren! what an animating motive to perfect holiness in the fear of God, is proposed to your faith in the blessed promise of life and immortality! What a reward for all the labours, and self-denials, of virtue! What a consolation under all the afflictions of life!—The happiness of heaven is essentially connected with purity of heart, with sanctity of manners, and with usefulness of living. And your progress in these divine qualities shall be the measure of your eternal felicity. The path of perfect virtue, indeed, is laborious, and often passes in its course over steep and difficult ascents. Our passions frequently render extremely painful the sacrifices which duty requires. We are obliged to combat with the world, its interests, its pleasures, its examples, its solicitations, and still more, to

maintain a constant conflict with our selves. But, contemplate the sublime recompence which religion confers on these labours and these sacrifices, and they are arduous no longer. What are the enticements by which vice would ensnare the heart, and withdraw it from virtue, compared with that *fulness of joy* that is in the *presence of God*, and those rivers of *pleasure* that flow at his *right hand forever more*! What are the labours or dangers of duty compared with its triumphant reward! *Endure hardness*, therefore *as good soldiers of Christ Jesus*, remembering that these short conflicts shall, ere long, gain for you crowns of victory, and encircle you with immortal glory.

Finally, this hope affords a good man the best consolation under affliction. All the necessary evils of life will soon be ended, and will open to him a peaceful entrance *into the joy of his Lord*. If disease and pain are hastening his *return to the dust from which he was taken*, why should he repine, since they are at the same time bringing him to those *living fountains* of immortal health, where *God shall wipe away all tears from his eyes*? If the dearest ties of friendship, or of love are broken asunder, and his heart is torn by

cruel bereavements; religion enables him to find a sweet repose in God his best friend, and conducts his hopes to a speedy and delightful re-union, in the regions of the blessed, with those pure and virtuous souls who were here most dear to his heart. In like manner, if poverty overwhelm him, or his fairest possessions have been blasted by the stroke of divine providence, are they not infinitely more than compensated in that *heavenly inheritance* to which, by divine grace, he is born?—And, when death comes to dissolve the temporary and decaying tabernacle in which he had sojourned in this barren wilderness, can he be dismayed, or yield to impious fears, when he sees beyond its flood the *land of promised rest*, in which there is prepared for him *a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heaven!*—

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord—yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them!

AMEN.

FINIS.

A LIST OF ERRORS,

Which the Reader is requested to correct, owing to the remote situation of the Author from the Press.

- Page 11, line 16, before *rancour* insert *the*
- Page 26, line 24, for *dreadful*, read *fearful*
- Page 41, line 25, for *ambitious*, read *ambitious*
- Page 46, line 14, for *cast of* read *cast off*
- Page 69, line 21, for *propably*, read *probably*
- Page 119, line 1, for *the*, read *all*
- Page 121, line 3, for *reflecting*, read *unreflecting*
- Page 122, line 6, for *assential*, read *essential*
- Page 126, note, for *peckereffe*, read *pochereffe*
- Page 169, line 15, strike out *to*
- Page 213, line 13, before *citizens*, insert *good*
- Page 216, line 24, for *from*, read *by*
do. line 23, for *receive*, read *hear*
do. line 24, after *destiny*, insert *pronounced.*
- Page 290, line 12, for *the*, read *an*
- Page 309, line 8, for *arew*, read *draw*
- Page 318, note, line 1, for *illuminatti*, read *illuminati*
- Page 321, line 3, after *but*, insert *they*
- Page 331, line 4, for *friendly*, read *finally*
- Page 338, line 9, for *breasts*, read *breast*
- Page 353, line 12, for *currapt*, read *corrupt*
- Page 370, line 8, for *they*, read *you*
do. line 9, for *them*, read *you*
- Page 384, line 12, after *posterity* insert —
do. line 14, strike out—before *on*
- Page 387, line 10, for *destraction*, read *distraktion*
- Page 405, line 7, for *uncovered*, read *undiscovered*
- Page 411, line 18, strike out *men*
- Page 430, line 21, for *even* read *ever*.

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